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THE SPARE ROOM







HIS HEAD STRUCK THE CORNER OF THE TEA-TABLE (p. 181)



THE SPARE ROOM

BY

MRS. ROMILLY FEDDEN

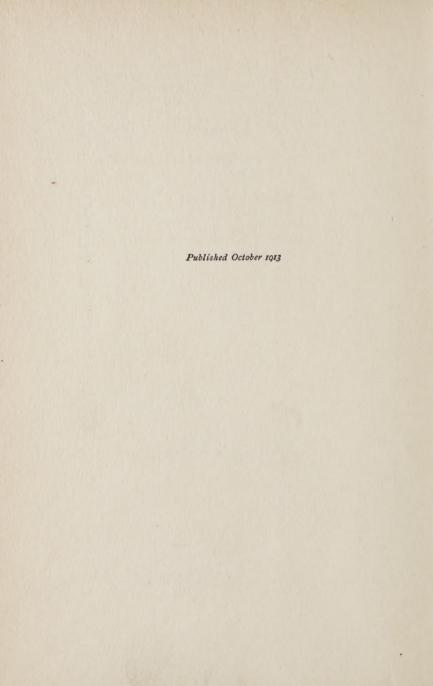
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

HAYDON JONES



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ILLUSTRATIONS

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PEOPLE IN THE BOOK

DACRE CARDEN — Aged 26. Heir to Burrough-Gosseley, Esq.

VICTORIA CARDEN - His wife, aged 19, an American.

Miss Sallie Radford — From New England, a friend of Victoria's.

James Saunders — Otherwise known as "Jimmie," a painter and friend of Dacre's.

MRS. BURROUGH-GOSSELEY — In the vanguard of modern progress. Aunt to Dacre Carden.

J. Burrough-Gosseley, Esq., J.P., Squire of Gosseley Hall, Wimford, Gossex — Her husband.

REV. LIONEL POTT - The Vicar.

Mrs. Eliphalet Mott Wade — A go-ahead lady, Victoria's American mother.

HIS EXCELLENCY PRINCE BORIS SALSIKOFF — Just a prince.

ZITA - A cook.

MARIA — A serving-maid and a goddess.



THE SPARE ROOM PART I



THE SPARE ROOM

LETTER I

FROM VICTORIA CARDEN TO SALLIE RADFORD

VILLA FELICE, CAPRI.

DEAR SALLIE, -

I shall never forgive you for missing my wedding. When you were on this side, too! Mamma was almost as disappointed as I was, for, with her eye to effect, she realised how much your presence would have added to the ensemble of the party. For the honour of the U.S.A. you should have been on the spot, instead of hung up in Dresden with tonsillitis. It was just the worst luck ever!

It does not seem possible that a month has passed since then. I have thought of you often, but Dacre and I have been dashing so that I have not had a minute to write. We came the same old way, London, Paris, Florence, Rome, Naples—crossed here for the day, fell in love with the island, and have taken this villa for two months.

Mamma promised me to send you all the papers

with pictures of me and Dacre, so I suppose you will have read all about it. It was rather nice, as weddings go. And though the number of Dacre's relations ("people," as they say in England) rather alarmed me, I believe that I managed to stagger through fairly creditably. Mamma did everything properly à l'anglais, of course (there was signing of the register and kissing all round in the vestry), for you know mamma is clever. My wedding-dress was a triumph to begin with. Paris and mamma is a combination that's hard to beat - and the bridesmaids' frocks were a tour de force. I wanted them pale pink and conventional, but she would not hear of it; said, "Always play up - or down - to your audience." And so they were copied from an Alma Tadema picture. The girls wore their hair filleted à la grecque, wore gilded sandals, and carried wreaths of wild thyme. They looked too silly for words, Sallie, but every one thought they were sweet. I had a page, too, a little cousin of Dacre's, dressed in 1830 clothes. Why 1830, I don't know, but mamma insisted, and she was quite right, for he was the success of the occasion. Dacre gave me a string of pearls which I wore; also a kind of platinum and diamond plaque from his uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Burrough-Gosseley. I don't mind telling you that it is hideous!

We had presents to burn. Some nice, but most of them not what you'd ever choose yourself. A lot of duplicates, of course. I don't mean to be ungrateful, but it does seem rather hard that people must start life handicapped by other people's bad taste! What a little pig I am.

I hated leaving mother. She is so clever and amusing that outsiders (even you) think she is quite independent. But really she is n't, and I hated to think of her alone. Happily Mrs. Chubb turned up the day before the wedding with a gorgeous new automobile — and insisted on taking mother off to the Riviera as soon as I should be gone. I insisted, too, though I am not over-fond of Mrs. Chubb. She talks such awful slang! Anyway, mother went, and is having the kind of time she always has, sailing into the centre of everything. Center Hodgson is at Cannes with his yacht, and you know that he has been devoted to Mother for years. He's a good old soul, but does n't stand much chance, I guess.

By the way, did I mention that Dacre and I are deadly poor? It does seem funny and awfully exciting. Mother can't allow me anything to speak of, and though Dacre's uncle and aunt are rich in a quiet, solid, old-fashioned way, Dacre himself is not. But we don't care tuppence (I'm getting awfully English!) and are as happy as clams. Still, it was odd to stop in Florence and not go near the shops! Not once, my dear, to Vollerani's, though I am longing for a big turquoise. Not once to the lace shop (you remember the frock mamma got there for 650 lire -only 130 dollars - you could n't have got it in New York for three times as much). Of course, I did not need anything, as I have heaps, and I really did not have time, either, because Dacre knew the galleries so well that he had to run round renewing acquaintance with every picture - and I ran too. He is awfully clever - knows such a lot! Take my advice, Sallie, and marry an Englishman. It is so good for us self-sufficient American girls—so chastening! I feel about ten when Dacre looks at me and says, "Really!" in that nasty, cool, superior Oxford manner. You bet I don't let him know it, though! Of course,

he does n't mean to be superior, but I suppose he subconsciously knows that if he is n't a trifle condescending at twenty-six, he will never be able to do the heavy squire at fifty.

Not that Uncle James (Mr. Burrough-Gosseley, you know) is exactly like that. He is a perfect old dear. We get on like a house afire.

But Aunt Clara is priceless. She is rather the buttressed, battlemented type. You know, runs the vicar and the village, and makes the poor people do exactly as her mother would have made them do. She wears mantles with fringe and bonnets with purple flowers. She likes me in one way and not in another. The word "American" shocks her old-fashioned prejudices, but there is a part of her which prides itself on being up-to-date and which embraces me as the new woman. You know, Sallie, I'm not that. You're more like it. Ideas bore me!

Well, imagine me, set down under her eye for the rest of my natural life! We're supposed to live in a nice, damp old manor-house called Little Gosseley, near their gates. Mark that word "supposed"—ahem!

Well, we have only been in the villa a week.

We went first to a hotel, but it was rainy and something was wrong with the steam heat, and I was so cold and miserable (I can't bear the cold) that Dacre suggested a villa with a nice fire in every room. So he left me trying to keep warm over the flame of the hot-water kettle in the teabasket and came back an hour later to say that he'd found just the place, servants and all. So we skipped as fast as we could! Dacre and I behaved like children when we got here, and ran all over the house and then the garden, found all kinds of nice places - among them an old stained marble seat, smothered in roses, quite big enough for two, though damp! It's quite a big villa, too, and though most of it is unfurnished, yet we have a Spare Room — which I have put in capitals because I am so proud of it! Oh, Sallie, if you're well enough to come South, do! We should both of us be more than pleased. Do.

Dacre sends whatever is the correct thing for husbands to send, and I give you a good old hug.

Ever your affectionate

VICTORIA.

P.S. Do, do come!

LETTER II

FROM DACRE CARDEN TO JAMES SAUNDERS

VILLA FELICE, CAPRI.

MY DEAR JIMMIE, -

Your letter has remained unanswered for a long time, but this lotus-land makes the use of pen and ink a loathsome London habit, and I have discarded the pen for a time to wield it again in the future with renewed vigour. We loved your letter, old chap. I say "we," because it came when Vic and I were sitting out on our terrace after dinner, so naturally we read it together, or, rather, I read it aloud. Jimmie, you are the most damnable of cynics, and your ideas on marriage are hopelessly amateur! Why the dickens should "marriage always make a difference," "a new order of things"? Bah! Your letter began so well, too. Vic thought you "all right," till I stumbled into the middle of your remark, "one has to think twice before one writes to a married friend who will read you aloud and discuss you with his wife." Then she

got quite huffy. By that time it had got so dark that we had to go inside and light the lamp, and I finished reading the letter in our sitting-room. You know the type - big and bare, grey walls, red-tiled floor, old tarnished gilt mirrors, and queer-shaped, out-of-date furniture! I spent a good half-hour there in talking about you, so Vic does not think you as much of a bear as you might imagine. It was more than half an hour, old J., because I started a harangue on paint, technique, quality, composition, academical standards versus the essentials of art. I dragged in the British Public and the N.E.A.C., and even touched the post-Impressionists with the end of a barge-pole! — rounding off the whole with a detailed description of your studio, from the dusty Venus by the chimney to the stuffed big trout you caught (I shall always maintain you got him on a worm) at Blagdon. I even took Vic up those creaking stairs to our bachelor quarters and the bathroom with the patent erratic shower. Vic said she had no idea I could talk so much. I explained that I was only more or less of a phonograph, and as nothing to you in my power of oratory.

So, you see, my missus knows you pretty well

now, and has for some time past, but the point I am working up to is that you don't know Victoria, which is a distinct drawback to your artistic education. The five minutes you saw her at the wedding don't count - and you were never at your bright best in a frock coat. This brings me to our spare room, a room of open space, fine proportions, and negative colour, quite the most beautiful room in Europe! If only we could get you to come out for a time! You could go your own way, if you want to work, and we'd only allow you to start talking after dinner. As for inspiration, you could find more here in a week than you could wring out of London fogs in a century. If you want models, our island is full of them. They are the old Greek gods and goddesses in masquerade. You will find one brown goddess waiting to pose for you without going farther than our villa - a girl from Ana-Capri, and our servant - Maria by name. Her hands and feet are poems, her voice is like that thing of Grieg's you used to play in the studio, and she has the face of a Madonna. I found myself trying to talk Italian to-day at lunch, just for the joy of hearing her answer, "Si, signor," or,

"Risotto, spaggetti - vino Monti Pulciano." -As a rule, however, the goddess is wonderfully silent (Vic thinks she is stupid, but that is pure jealousy). Knowing your views, I fancy you might marry her, Jimmie. I think we have found your ideal - and you will have a clear field if you come at once, as the goddess told Vic this morning that she now has no inamorato. Her last, it seems, had a fight with our gardener and cut a piece out of his (the gardener's) left calf. So the goddess threw his stiletto over the garden wall and pushed him after it. I cannot believe with Vic that she is stupid, — otherwise, she has all the attributes you could desire: a face and voice and clothes that could never get on your nerves, and long, unfathomable silences wherein you could talk and expound to your heart's content. However, Vic says she is stupid, so you may still be safe.

As for our villa, I wish I could paint it with half its charm—but its charm is intangible. Speaking baldly and architecturally, you will enter through an old carved, green-painted gate, along a vine-covered cloister with huge brown earthen pots of flowers between the arches, which

is always a place of blue, cool shadows, even in the heat of midday.

At the back of the house is a low walled terrace with one huge gnarled cypress guarding a corner, backed by a big ruined dovecot, and you go down from the terrace by steps to a lower garden where a broken gate leads to the olive groves and through to the cliff and the sea.

I take you back to the house. There are two furnished rooms that look out on the terrace, and our bed- and dressing-rooms lead out of them. Most of the house is disused and falling to ruin. We found this morning a locked room which might once have been a salon, but now is used to dry olives. Across the patio is our guest-room, waiting for you. We would both be more than pleased if you would come and take it for a time. Just send me a wire if you can tear yourself away from London. You won't regret it from a painting point of view, and Vic and I will be delighted to have you.

Ever yours,
DACRE CARDEN.

LETTER III

FROM VICTORIA CARDEN TO HER MOTHER MRS. ELIPHALET MOTT WADE

VILLA FELICE, CAPRI.

DEAR MAMMA, -

Your letter from Cannes. No, I don't need another cent. For why? There is nothing that we can spend anything on here!

We are having an out-of-sight time. Though you might not think so, as we have not seen a soul since we took the villa. Rather different from your mad whirl! I am glad that you are having such a scrumptious time. Say all kinds of things to Center Hodgson for me—anything that won't encourage him too much, that is.

I rather wonder what you would say if you could see me here. It is quite the most primitive place that I've ever been in, but heavenly.

Have I told you about our first night here? You know how I hate cold. Well, the steam heat was not working at the hotel, and I had nearly frozen there, so as soon as I got here, I told

Maria, our maid, to light a fire in the drawingroom. Dacre and I (it was drizzling) were trying to be blithe and gay, inspecting our domain, though it did n't look exactly healthy in the wet, but we were thinking of hot tea in a warm room. Well, when I came in from the garden and opened the drawing-room door, I got a horrid shock. I was blinded by clouds of smoke! I don't believe there had ever been a fire in that grate before. Dacre threw open the windows, Maria fanned the blaze, together they tried every experiment. No good, - the smoke just went on pouring out. Tears ran down my cheeks, not all from smoke. Dacre saw them — with all his faults, he is a gentleman, so he pretended not to! I retired to the dining-room. He followed me, of course. "Come," he said, "let's look on the bright side. Behind the smoke, the fire's still shining." That silly speech made me cry in earnest instead of laugh. We spent the evening in the kitchen, to keep warm, and went to bed at nine, quite exhausted. But I was not to sleep long! I was waked up in the middle of the night by the weirdest noise—a dull thud—thud—thud. I looked, and there was Dacre creeping along the wall in

his pyjamas, with a candle in one hand and a knotted towel in the other, thumping the wall. As he came nearer, I was simply scared stiff! You know how handsome Dacre is. Well, he was grotesque. One eye was shut up, and his face all out of shape, and he was muttering imprecations between his teeth in the most horrid way. It made my blood run cold. I wondered if there was any insanity in his family — or fits. Suddenly he saw me staring at him, but he only glared back, and kept on whacking the wall. Finally, I said very quietly, so as not to excite him:—

"Dacre, what is it? Can't you sleep? Won't you stop?"

"I'll get you, you devil!" he said; and he hauled off and whacked harder than ever.

By that time I was really terrified, so I sat up in bed and said firmly, "Dacre, how dare you!"

Through his swollen lips he murmured, "Mosquitoes." Then I became quite hysterical.

But it's all right now. The fires burn and draw, and there is a mosquito-net for every bed, even unto the spare room. 'Cause we've got one! A real live Spare Room! When you are tired of Cannes and Mrs. Chubb, or if Mr. Center Hodg-

son becomes too pressing in his attentions (oh! I know!) — all you need do is to retire to us here and we will lap you in mosquito-netting — not to mention roses. Heaps of them.

Dacre says to tell you seriously that we shall both be more than pleased if you will come, as we are quite a sensible honeymoon pair.

Ever, with love, Vic.

P.S. Have you heard anything from Sallie? I hope that you sent her the papers — good old Sallie. I want Dacre to meet her. Would n't it be funny if she were to marry an Englishman, too, and live in England? Too good to be true, with all the Americans who are chasing after her. Well, my loss would be my country's gain, though I am not patriotic enough to be consoled by that.

I am, though! Patriotic, I mean. I never knew it till I came abroad and married an Englishman; how all kinds of absurd things stir me up, and I begin to sympathise with the awful people who wear the flag as a hatband! In forty years' time, when I am the stout lady of Gosseley Hall, I can imagine myself suddenly nailing my flag to

the mast and going down in a burst of spreadeagleism, as a kind of wild bust, after years of carefully bottled-up love for the U.S.A.

Why does it take us like this? I suppose we've had to stand so much criticism of our "new" country in the last hundred years that we are all born on the defensive. It makes me fling "I'm an American" with an air of proud defiance, and when my neighbour at dinner invariably answers, "Oh, but I like Americans," I have an almost irresistible desire to slap him, when, of course, even a sarcastic "That is good of you!" is out of the question. As it is, I simply smile my sweetest at him, and determine to make one more Englishman capitulate. That's the very way Dacre began - in his most bored tone, too. They always say it as if it were a proof of such a broad-minded, open-to-conviction spirit. Goodbye, darling. Be reassured. Dacre and I are the best of friends. V.C.

LETTER IV

FROM SALLIE RADFORD TO VICTORIA CARDEN

DEUTSCHE STRASSE, 21/1, DRESDEN.

MY REALLY DEAR VIC, -

Marriage with the paragon has not changed you to any visible degree yet, I see. Your letter has not lost the old earmarks. When are you going to grow up! What under the sun do you want of more turquoises! I am delighted to hear that you are really poor. It's your only chance for salvation! Do you remember how you used to sit on the footstool at my feet in my room at home, after some party where you had behaved particularly outrageously, and swear that you had no conscience — could n't be bothered with one? How I used to lecture you! Now I really believe that I can trust you to your nice man, and that he will make you as nice as you ought to be!

Yes, Mrs. Wade sent me the papers, which was very kind of her in all her rush at Cannes. I should have loved to have seen you in your wedding-dress, and I was so disappointed at not be-

ing there, that I could have cried, on the day, had I not felt that your wedding must not be the cause of any tears. So I squeezed 'em back, and had a few flowers in my room to celebrate instead. Tonsillitis is a horrid, dreary, depressing business, but I have been up for two weeks now, and am really quite well again, and at my music. But Art seems longer than ever, and Time more fleeting, and I get desperately discouraged, which is as it ought to be! Still, I know that I have improved, for they begin to say that I can sing, not will sing! That makes all the difference, so I am slaving. I want to do all I can to perfect my voice, 'cause it is a nice voice! But, oh! happy Vic, it is n't all strawberries and cream. I do feel a lonely old spinster when I think on my twenty-four years, and realise that father and mother are both gone, and that the old house is closed, and I am really a wanderer.

I'd come to you like a shot, my dear, and love it, if I were not too hard-up. But I have had an orgy of opera, and really can't afford the journey. But you can't think how the garden calls me! I know my soul (yes, I believe that I have one) was born in a garden, and it's always home-

sick shut in streets and houses. It's always looking for green places and making me sigh like a furnace. Dresden is windy and dusty, and some one is practising scales next door out of tune—and—Victoria! the mayflower is blossoming now under the snow in New England.

Good-bye, dear Vic. Make your nice man like me. By the way, I do like your new in-laws, even Aunt Clara, and the manor-house need n't be damp in these days of central-heizung.

Good-bye, happy one.

S.R.

LETTER V

FROM DACRE CARDEN TO THE REV. LIONEL POTT

VILLA FELICE, CAPRI.

MY DEAR VICAR, -

Apologies are certainly due to you. Your kind wedding-gift to me has been too long unacknowledged, but, under the circumstances, you will, I know, understand and forgive my unusual neglect of the pen. The inkstand shall hold the place you suggest on my writing-table — whether "of honour" remains to be seen. It was a most original idea to have it made in the form of a model of Gosseley Hall, and your idea is most skilfully carried out. It shall certainly go down as an heir-loom at Gosseley.

We have thus far had good weather and a most enjoyable month.

If you take your usual spring holiday as far afield as Italy, you must be sure to look us up. We have a spare room, and both my wife and myself will be more than pleased to see you.

With our united kind remembrances, I am, Sincerely yours, DACRE CARDEN.

LETTER VI

FROM MRS. BURROUGH-GOSSELEY TO VICTORIA CARDEN

Gosseley Hall, Wimford, Gossex.

I TAKE up my pen, dear Victoria, after a series of domestic worries and anxieties, to give you our news (such as it is!). It must only be a hurried note, however, as Mr. Day, the new curate, is dining with us to-night. Firstly, your uncle has not been at all well of late. I think, liver. His diet has not been all I could wish, and, as I tell him, one cannot hope to be well, at his age, unless one thinks more of these things. I tried to persuade him to spend a week at Bournemouth and take pine baths — but you know how self-willed your Uncle James can be!!

Again, I trusted my friend Miss McAll would have had some influence. She came to stay with me for last week-end (only leaving us on Tuesday last). She is a most interesting and cultivated woman, Victoria, and I find her intensely stimulating. She subsists principally on nuts. I am sorry to say they did not get on as well as I should

have wished (she and your Uncle James, I mean). She (Miss McAll) has become most interested in electricity of late, and always carries this curative machine with her. She explained the whole thing to me (it is very scientific), and let me come into her room and see it working. One sits on a metal plate and fastens other moulded plates about one's person — each of these plates communicates with the electric battery by wires and one can regulate the force of this Life-giving current at pleasure! She (Miss McAll) is a wonderfully advanced thinker. I find her most stimulating. She went on to explain that the result was even more efficacious in the privacy of one's own rooms, with even less clothing on. She was most anxious that your uncle should try this new invention during dinner that night (I mean, it was at dinner that she discussed it with him), and further, that he should go to see the inventor, Mr. Horace Biles (the man, you remember, who started the Pure Food Restaurant in the Tottenham Court Road a few years ago). We (Miss McAll and myself) regard him as quite in the vanguard of modern thought, and his latest book, "Curative Clothing," was of intense interest.

To return to my domestic worries. Both Kate and Charlotte have given notice within the last fortnight. As I say, the more one does for the modern servant, the more unreasonable they are! I am anxious to try the Ladies' Guild again, but your uncle is terribly opposed to it. He does not like the idea of a lady waiting on him. I feel your uncle is in a very nervous state just now, and so I have not pressed the point, but I cannot help feeling that a second trial could not be as upsetting as the first. Your uncle has always carried the cellarette key since she left. Of course, she could never have been a lady, but I confess I have somewhat lost faith in the Guild. With her excellent testimonials, too!

I was determined, after dear Dacre had gone, to have a thorough overhauling of the West Wing. It is extraordinary how things will accumulate! Especially broken china — Charlotte has been breaking things right and left of late. I try to think she is not doing it on purpose. That reminds me that all your wedding-presents (your uncle had them all insured the day you left) are now locked in the gun-room till you come back. Every one seemed to think the wedding went off

very well, but I and your Uncle James felt very sad after you had gone, my dears. Of course, Dacre has always been here so much, and is more like our own son.

I must just tell you (though it is time I went to dress for dinner) that Mr. Day, the new curate, is coming to dine with us to-night before the missionary meeting at the village Hall (your uncle is taking the chair). It is a new mission Mr. Day is very interested in, in Spain. He is such an intense and earnest young fellow, though your Uncle James and I sometimes think him a little narrow - and he has a habit of smoothing his nose which irritates your uncle. But one must not be uncharitable, my dear, and there are many people in Wimford who would doubtless think your Uncle James and myself too broad — though perhaps on different lines. I cannot feel that your uncle will ever be in the vanguard with regard to Food Reform and Hygiene (he took a positive dislike to my friend Miss McAll); but I must not go on gossiping, my dear, as it is already seven o'clock and the second gong may ring at any minute. The meeting is at eight, so we have to dine early. Now I must really stop. Your uncle would join me in love, had he not already gone out to dress for dinner. I had to change his dressing-room while the West Wing was being overhauled, and he is now using Dacre's old room over the coach-house.

We think of you two dear people constantly. My one prayer and wish is that you may always be truly happy, as happy as James and myself have always been — in spite of our small disagreements with regard to advanced thought and the food question. (Life, I fear, is often a tangle.) I trust that it may be so.

The gong has sounded for some time, and I really must stop.

Ever your affectionate aunt,

CLARA.

P.S. Dacre will have told you about Miss Pott, who lives in Wimford—the vicar's sister. She travelled in Spain with a Cook's party only last year, and is going to speak at the meeting to-night. She was only this morning telling me about those wonderful cathedrals! It seems so sad that they can't be made some use of (spiritually, I mean). Rome's power in Spain, Miss Pott tells me, is truly terrible. She said the

things she saw there at times, and the smell of incense, quite spoilt her pleasure in the trip.

P.S. My domestic troubles came to a head with Charlotte when taking your presents to the gun-room. She foolishly broke a butter-dish (I had warned her of the steps). I do hope you won't be annoyed, dear, but there were six other butter-dishes, and this was the one with the blue enamel border, which you did not like. I was quite upset about it.

P.S. Miss Pott had taken some of those press leaflets (those I was so interested in last year) with her to Spain, and always, when she went into the cathedrals, she left one or more in the pews. One trusts that it may be some little use, but as Miss Pott says, anything one can do is really so little.

P.S. I hope Dacre will make thorough enquiries about the drains in Italy—one can't be too careful. I understand that Miss Pott found them very unsatisfactory in Spain.

LETTER VII

FROM VICTORIA CARDEN TO MRS. BURROUGH-GOSSELEY

DEAR AUNT CLARA, -

We were delighted to receive your letter with all the news of Gosseley Hall and the village. Dacre said that it made him feel quite homesick — which I hope is not true!

We were very sorry to hear that Uncle James is not well, and hope by this time that he is better. Do you think that he will try Miss McAll's electrical battery (is that what it is called? I am very ignorant of these things), or shall you persuade him to try a change of air? Dacre says that I am to tell you to be careful about trying experiments on Uncle James. And as I have promised to obey him, I must do as he tells me—though I think it rather impertinent to suggest that you do not know best!

Miss Pott sounds interesting. I hope I may meet her some day. I should like to have seen her scattering tracts in the Spanish cathedrals. Dacre says that he would, too.

How tiresome of Kate and Charlotte! I am sorry that our wedding-presents were indirectly the cause of the crisis -though I cannot feel the regret I should over the loss of that butterdish. We hope that the new German manservant is a success. You were so brave, I think, to engage one who speaks no English, as none of you speak German. But Dacre says that you take him to the Berlitz School whenever you want a heartto-heart talk with him. What a splendid idea! I wish there were one in Capri! I should march Maria and Zita (our two) there every morning, and give them the orders for the day! As it is, I stumble and struggle with phrase-books and dictionaries through the menu from soup to dessert, with the most unexpected results when the dinner is served.

It is sweet of you to say that you miss me, dear Aunt Clara. Of course you must miss Dacre more — I can't imagine how you can exist without him! But I must not get on to that subject, even to you, or I shall never stop. Still, I may say — just to you — that I do think that he is the nicest thing that ever lived! And except for Uncle James, I am sure that you will agree with

me. And so clever, Aunt Clara! I know that we shall be proud of his success. I think his book reviews in the "Times" are always the best, and from what he has read me of his book on the "Life of a Friend of a Friend of Ben Jonson," it seems to me really brilliant. It takes so much more brains to write a book about a man whom no one has ever heard of than to write of Jonson or Shakespeare, or even Bacon — does it not? I want him to write a novel, too. He could. I mean, any one can. At least, they do! And Dacre has such an original outlook, and such an independent way of thinking, that I know he could do something good. As long as we are not obliged to depend for our living on Dacre's writing, he might as well try everything, and so hit something which will be a howling success. It would be amusing to be the wife of a successful literary man and have a salon in London, and meet hordes of celebrities!

You see, Aunt Clara, I am apt to let my tongue—or my pen—run away with me. For, of course, we are really going back to Wimford to live at Little Gosseley. By the way, dear Aunt Clara, Dacre said you would superintend the

planting of the garden. If it is time for sowing sweet-pea seeds, will you *please* ask the gardener to put in miles of them, for I love to have masses of them to pick, don't you?

Please excuse this blot! I am using a new fountain-pen, as I am writing on the rocks while Dacre lies on his back in the sun and plays 'possum for the pleasure of startling the little lizards when he moves. He says you won't know what it is to "play 'possum." I will tell you one day in England. Dacre is waiting, so I must stop. He is looking very well and handsome in a suit of white Capri flannels which he has just had made here. He says to tell you that he believes that change of air would do Uncle James more good than anything—either Bournemouth or Brighton for a time. But I say, come to Capri, and be our first guests in our first spare room!

Our love to you and Uncle James from Dacre and

Your very affectionate
VICTORIA WADE CARDEN.

LETTER VIII

FROM JAMES BURROUGH-GOSSELEY, ESQ., J.P., TO DACRE CARDEN

My DEAR DACRE, -

We were so glad to get your cards en route, and your Victoria's charming letter from your sunny villa. My dear boy, it all sounds delightful, and my news, I fear, is proportionately dull. However, it may interest you to know that I've sold the two bays and am even contemplating a motor. Don't rub it in, my boy, by saying "I told you so!" When all is said and done, I can't afford to keep carriages and cars while this Government holds office. Things seem to get darker every day on the Political Horizon, and one never knows where it may end with these Radical scamps in power at Westminster. After all, if your aunt would rather have her car than her brougham, I'm quite satisfied. Personally I hate the things and am quite content with my garden and the home-farm. Jakes and I have been doing a good deal on the water meadows during the

last month, cutting away the right bank and enlarging the water from the weir to the Marhl hole. The weeds won't need as much cutting back this season, I fancy. I shot a 14-lb. pike in Silverden pool only yesterday, and Jakes has shot two or three more during the week, so the trout may come on to the mayfly better this season. Twenty years ago, Silverden was the pick of the fishing, and I remember the colonel killed a fine brace of fish there as late as 1908 before the pike got out of hand.

Between the river and the garden I have been doing a good deal of pottering about and the weather has really been excellent for this time of year. We had a good two hours' sunshine yesterday morning. I suppose that brought the pike out. I see a good many letters in the "Times" on the English climate. There seems a tendency in these days to run down everything English, including the weather. Anyway, England is good enough for me, if only one could eliminate the present Government. Your aunt has been trying to persuade me to go to the South of France—I have had a touch of gout of late, and she has made up her mind I want a change—but I do

not like the idea. As you know, I hate the Continent. Since then, some of the maids have given notice, and we may be forced to go somewhere for a time. Between you and me, Dacre, I was determined not to go to Cannes till this morning, when I discovered your aunt had leanings towards "Woman's Suffrage." A Miss McAll has been staying here for a few days, a most objectionable woman — not the kind of person one likes to see about the house. I took a great dislike to the woman from the first, and I now discover that this person has been lending your aunt militant literature of the worst kind. You know, my dear Dacre, how anxious your aunt is to be in the vanguard (I use her own phrase) of any new movement. In the past the militant possibility has only loomed as a vague terror in the back of my mind. I have always been careful not to mention the subject before your aunt. I think I may say without disloyalty that I have disguised my feelings, knowing by experience how your aunt always champions any cause of which I do not approve. You must not misunderstand her actions, Dacre. Your aunt is the most estimable of women, and is not antagonistic through disregard of my feelings, but she regards me as old-fashioned and conventional, and is therefore anxious to bring me to her side in what she calls the vanguard of modern thought. I cannot take such a place by the side of such persons as Miss McAll and Horace Biles, and vegetarian food for more than a day always makes me ill. You know your aunt always carries her new theories to extremes. Perhaps I am old-fashioned, but the idea of your aunt as a militant suffragette is more than I can bear. I am as anxious as any chivalrous Englishman to uphold the dignity of womanhood, but these women, by their atrocious behaviour during the last four months, have shown themselves unworthy of their glorious birthright and have cheapened and degraded the purity, the dignity, the sweetness and grace of English womanhood. I have honestly tried to keep an open mind on the subject for some time past, and I have avoided reading anything relative to their movements in the papers. Their attack on Kew Gardens, however, and ruthless destruction of rare and beautiful flowers there of late destroyed my last grain of patience. I am only thankful they

have not started their outrageous practices at Wimford. Perhaps even this wish is too sanguine, as things came to a head this morning in my own family circle! At the conclusion of family prayers, I was thunderstruck by a request from your Aunt Clara that the servants should not leave the room, but should resume their chairs. Your aunt then read aloud a long account of the latest militant outrage in London, which she lauded to the skies, and then read a paper of the most inflammatory nature by the notorious Mrs. Krankhurst. We did not commence our breakfast till 10.30, and from that time till luncheon I vainly tried to calm and dissuade her. I have never seen your aunt so overwrought and antagonistic. Yes, on this occasion I fear that is the only word that could meet the case. She talked as if I had ill-treated and degraded her even from my earliest youth — and she is determined, in spite of my most earnest entreaties, to journey to London this coming week to attend a militant demonstration. For all I know, she will carry missiles in her muff, and I shall be left here powerless and prostrate.

My dear Dacre, you cannot imagine the men-

tal strain and worry I am now undergoing. I think my only possible way out of this ghastly dilemma is to accompany my poor wife to London. I am feeling far from well now, and I think it will be a simple matter to bring on a bad attack of gout and heart in the train, which, if severe enough, may possibly tide us over the time while the demonstration is going on, and then I think I may be able to get your poor aunt out of the country before she is arrested. Your aunt was anxious to go to the south of France, so to Cannes we must go, and my one prayer is that I may get her there before anything happens. I shall wire you as soon as we are safely out of the country.

Believe me,

Your devoted uncle,

JAMES BURROUGH-GOSSELEY.

LETTER IX

FROM MRS. ELIPHALET MOTT WADE TO HER DAUGHTER, VICTORIA CARDEN

Hôtel d'Angleterre et d'Amérique, Cannes.

DEAR VIC, -

I simply cannot think of you as married. I refuse to. It makes me feel too old — and that I'm not! I suppose it is true that I'm your mother, is n't it? I ask because in all my life I have never had so gay a time as I am having now. We've simply done everything there is to do, and you know on the Riviera there is something doing! I was quite right not to bring you here last winter, for I do not consider it any place for the jeune fille. But it suits me for a while down to the ground.

Well, my dear, clothes! They are wonderful, simply wonderful! Chic is n't the word! These Russians at their best make me feel like a ragbag, and you know that your mother knows how to put her clothes on. On the whole, I really do feel, though, that Annette has done very well

for me. That little pale-blue evening frock with the cerise touches holds its own anywhere. My hats, too, are not bad. You thought they were rather gay. My dear, they are prim beside those that the Grand Duchess Olga has been wearing this last week (she must be fifty at least). Vic, she came to dine with us on the yacht the other night in a frock that was a dream, absolutely the last shriek! My dear, you never saw such a thing. It sounds hideous, because, unless it were done by an artiste, it would be. It was orange satin, veiled with pale green and cerise, and had a tunic of maize tulle embroidered in gold thread. Of course, it sounds hopeless, but it was absolutely perfect, and I am going to order one just like it to take back to Newport.

But don't think that clothes fill all my waking hours! We are a very sporting crowd. Center Hodgson has three automobiles and we have had some bully trips into the country back of Cannes with little al-fresco lunches. Just a pâté and a Waldorf salad, a bottle of Château Yquem and some exquisite fruit. It tastes much better out of doors than the longest menu in the house—that is, if you have plenty of servants to pack up.

There have been lots of parties. One yesterday at those Chicago Higginbothams, which was supposed to be a representative gathering of English and Americans. It looked for a time representative enough, but they gathered at opposite ends of the drawing-room. The English with their most oh-gracious expressions. But I carried the flag into the enemies' camp and captured Sir Aubrey Decies, whom I knew so well when he was at the Legation in Washington, and then I annexed the Earl of Tarford and was extremely gracious to the Countess (who is used to being ignored), and it ended by being quite a nice party. The Higginbothams sent me a gorgeous box of flowers last night - orchids and things at five dollars a stalk.

We are all mad about motor-boats and aeroplanes. I adore motor-boating! and simply live in the hope of flying. Your villa sounds rather depressing, dear. But a man whom I met in Cairo (when you were visiting the Gosseleys), and who has just turned up here, tells me that Capri is really ideal. Still, I don't quite see myself joining you. Oh, by the way, here's a little cheque. I remembered afterwards that you have been longing for another turquoise, and I suppose you will stop in Florence on your way back. Vollerani's is the best place for them. I made a hit at the tables the other night. Center Hodgson insisted on putting a louis on for each of us, but I was the only lucky one.

Good-bye, darling. Take care of your complexion in that hot sun, and do make Dacre spruce up a bit in his clothes, though it is n't any of my funeral! But Englishmen are so funny—they do love awful old clothes.

Bye-bye, dear. Will send you news, though we may be off to anywhere at any moment. Love to Dacre — from your affectionate mother,

ELISE WADE.

P.S. I am not going to order that dress, after all. It does not suit my style a bit.

TELEGRAMS

I

DACRE CARDEN, Villa Felice, Capri.

Prepare for surprise. Your aunt and I accept your kind invitation—arriving by afternoon boat from Naples, Thursday. Pott with us—hope you can put up if not impossible.

UNCLE JAMES.

 Π

CARDEN, Villa Felice, Capri.

Thanks invitation. Tramping. Trust find your hospitable roof Thursday or Friday.

JIMMIE.

III

MRS. CARDEN, Villa Felice, Capri.

Hurrah! Arriving Thursday.

SALLIE.



PART II



CHAPTER I

SILENCE is sometimes more eloquent than speech. It then expresses a degree of blank despair beyond the power of words—a despair before which the tongue is voiceless. Such moments are fortunately few in the lives of most of us. It is seldom that grief, surprise, sorrow, or fear is so surpassing as to deprive us of the comfort of, at least, ejaculation. It is only in the face of an overwhelming catastrophe that we sit speechless. So the Cardens sat on a certain May day upon the terrace of their villa at Capri.

As Maria, the goddess, stepped out through the door, regally bearing coffee to her young master and mistress, the silence, so to speak, hit her in the face. The dry cackle of the strange English tongue, which usually greeted and amused her, had ceased: ceased, too, their laughter. Across the luncheon-table, set under an awning, the signor and signora gazed with desperate eyes over a sheaf of blue telegrams at

each other. As Maria bore down upon them she saw from their distraught expressions that something was very gravely amiss.

"Coffee, signora," she announced in her softest voice; but Victoria Carden waved her mutely aside, and even the signor put out his hand to take his cup from her in an absent, stricken fashion.

Maria gazed down upon them, her simple soul troubled. She liked them. She had liked to see their happiness. As she removed the fruit and wine, she wondered at the silence. She thought that the signora shaded her face because she was crying. Surely she had nothing to cry about, when the signor so plainly adored her. Maria wished they would speak. But they did not, and so she sadly withdrew from the terrace, through the dining-room, and hastened along the cloistered way to the kitchen, where her large, fat, and lazy mother, Zita, was already composing herself for her afternoon siesta.

As Maria set the bottles of red and white Ischia wine and the woven rush basket of fruit which Victoria had so artistically arranged only that morning, piling colour upon colour in a bed of green, upon the table, her fat parent grunted impatiently.

"Madre de Dio, Maria! What has taken you? You look as if you had lost every friend, and your lover as well. And what are you bringing the fruit and the wine here for? They belong in the dining-room. Wake up, you silly girl."

Maria shook her head.

"Alas, my mother! Something has happened to my beautiful ones. They sit there upon the terrace, face to face, not a smile, not a word. They who used to laugh and chatter always! Ah! how sad is life!"

"Pru-u-t!" Zita shrugged. "Lovers' quarrels. What will you? It is the honeymoon. Before a week — one little week — had passed after my wedding-day, I tell thee, thy father had drawn his stiletto upon me! It is nothing. Be not concerned; it will pass."

"Si, si," Maria answered contemptuously, "for people like thee — like me — of the people. But for these of the quality it is different. It is not a quarrel. It is worse. The blue papers have done it. They were quite happy. Then I carried in one paper — it was with the lobster — and

they were surprised and a little sad, but very brave. Then I carried in another paper — it was with the salad and quail — and they were more surprised, and more troubled, but still brave. Then, after the dessert, I carried in the third. I did not wait to see, but when I go back with the coffee, it is all over. They are no more brave. The trouble is great. The telegrams are evil. They have cast a spell upon my children."

Zita crossed her fingers hastily. "Thou shouldst not speak of spells when I would sleep, lest the Evil One should hear, and harm thy mother. Telegrams, and all inventions, are truly of the Devil. Take back the fruit and wine. I will sleep. There — they call thee — go."

"Maria! Maria!" It was Dacre Carden's voice, but the pleasant baritone had an unusual note of sharpness.

Maria sped, while Zita, stretching like a cat, closed her eyes and resumed her interrupted doze.

On the terrace Maria found the signor pacing up and down, the evil blue papers in his hands, a frown on his handsome face, and his coffee still untouched upon the table. The beautiful signora, still seated at the table, was dabbing her eyes with a small damp handkerchief, as she talked very fast. Maria recognized a slight note of hysteria in the breathless voice, though she could not understand the words.

"No, I can't bear it! I simply can't! I have never heard of anything so inconsiderate! Pursuing people on their honeymoon! Uncle James—and Aunt Clara—and Sallie—and Jimmie—and—and—Mr. Pott!—Pott!! That's the last straw. Pott! No, Dacre, no—don't talk. Wire them all to stay away. I don't want to see any of them. I don't want them. We have n't asked them."

"Too late, Victoria." Maria now recognized the tone of the strong man who hopes by firmness and patience to quiet a very weak woman. "Too late, my dear. We can't catch them anywhere. They are on the way. Besides, it is not fair to say that. We have asked them."

"You may have, but I have n't. Do you think I should have been so *insane*, so utterly idiotic, as to ask a whole houseful of people here, when we have only *one spare room?*" Her voice rose in a scornful wail.

"Yes, but, Victoria, you must rise to the occasion. Of course, it is damnable. The whole thing is utterly sickening, but you don't realise—"

"Don't I!"

"— Realise, Victoria, that it is now two o'clock, and that these people, the whole five, are coming by the afternoon boat, arriving at halfpast four, and that we are three miles from town and must find beds to sleep them."

Victoria rolled her handkerchief into a ball, set her tilted chin defiantly, and answered doggedly,—

"Send them to an hotel."

"My dear!" Dacre's voice was reproachful.

"There's Maria waiting all this time to know what you want. You did call her, you know." Young Mrs. Carden tapped the floor with the tip of her white-buckled shoe.

The signor gazed helpless from the pouting face of his pretty wife to the placid young goddess waiting for orders. He shook his head. "Go away, Maria," he commanded, "and come back in ten minutes — dieci minuti."

Maria withdrew. Victoria sniffed. "What do you suppose to gain by that?" she inquired.



SO INCONSIDERATE, PURSUING PEOPLE ON THEIR HONEYMOON!



"I am not going to change my mind in ten minutes."

"Oh, yes, you are," Dacre answered quietly under his breath as he watched Maria out of sight. Then he turned to his wife. She looked unutterably charming in her white frock, the red rose he had picked for her stuck in her belt, her piquant face turned from him, her round chin somewhat ostentatiously propped on a slender hand where he caught the sparkle of the ring that he had given her.

"Victoria." Dacre's voice could be very soft, very deep and tender. But there was no response.

"Victoria." She shook her head pettishly.

"Don't be a spoiled child." The voice was very beguiling, but she flung an answer without turning.

"But I am spoiled. I told you I was, and mamma told you so. I am spoiled — and oh! — what would mamma say if she knew that all these tiresome people were coming to spoil my honeymoon! She would never do anything so stupid. But mamma has tact!"

Dacre, who at the beginning of this speech

had taken a step towards her with a smile, stopped at the last words, and the smile vanished.

"I don't know about your friend, Miss Radford," he said coldly, "but I do know that my dear old people would cut off their hands before they would thrust themselves in where they are not wanted. Same with Jimmie. He's a proud beggar. It is not a question of tact with them exactly. They are counting on our friendship and — er — affection — if you will. You must believe that. As for Pott —"

"Dacre!" A sweet, flushed, penitent face was turned up to him, two hands were held out, and in a moment Victoria was drawn up to his arms. "I am a wretched, selfish pig, Dacre. You are the only one in the world who can make me good. I am ashamed of being such a baby. Forgive me — but — oh, what shall we do?"

"Put our two heads together. That's the only way. You don't realise yet, Mrs. Carden, what a combination we are. First, let's call Maria and Zita, and we shall soon see how we can fix them up!"

"We can't!"

"We must, my queen. We can't turn uncle

and aunt away after inviting them, and hurt their feelings. You must not forget that our whole future depends on them. There is no entail. There is no obligation, Victoria. There are other nephews, and I am heir to Gosseley Hall only because Uncle James likes me the best."

"Oh, of course, Dacre. How could they help it? Well, they can have the spare room. I really am delighted to have them. But the others—"

"Well, Pott comes with them. He's rather an ass. Anything will do for Pott."

"I see. Anything will do for Pott."

"Then your friend Sallie. We can't send her alone to an hotel, can we?"

"In Capri? Good gracious, no!"

"And poor old Jimmie is always broke, and will probably arrive with his last lira spent, counting on us to put him up till his next allowance arrives."

"I see. Well, I suppose we might give Sallie your dressing-room. It's quite large and has a single bed. Then, we could put Jimmie — where could we put Jimmie? Oh, here's Maria. Ask her, Dacre. Or, wait, I'll get the phrase-book and dictionary."

CHAPTER II

"The great point," Dacre said impressively, as she reappeared, "is to be diplomatic, to break it to them gently. We can depend on Maria. But I think we may have trouble with Zita. Now, at all costs, let us be diplomatic." He smiled blandly at Maria as a beginning.

"Yes, that sounds all right," Victoria agreed. "Diplomacy is fine, and quite possible when you have some slight command of a language. I don't mean to be rude. But, how can any one be diplomatic in dictionary Italian? If you can, you are even cleverer than I thought you. Look here," she went on, turning the pages of her book, "I don't know what subject this comes under."

"War, I should say," Dacre answered grimly. "You won't find it in the first part. Oh, hang it, I shall make a dash at it without the book."

"Shall I go?" Victoria demanded wickedly. "Sure you can't be more diplomatic without me?"

"Don't be absurd." Dacre looked his most dignified, handsome self. Maria, a figure of imperturbable beauty, sighed from the doorway.

"For goodness' sake, Dacre, begin," Victoria admonished. "She is tired waiting. I can't find anything but condolences here that seem to fit the occasion. But she'd better bring her mother first. Maria, wilt thou have the kindness to call thy mother?"

The goddess turned once more and disappeared, while Victoria, throwing her books on the table, sank into a scarlet-cushioned chair. "A reprieve! But only for a minute, Dacre. Oh, we two poor little things. It's pathetic. Here they come. I believe you are right. I don't like the look of Zita. There's battle in her eye! Oh, I know, Maria has waked her from her afterdinner nap. How unlucky. She is always vicious when that happens. She will be cross!" Victoria beamed upon the pair in the doorway. Dacre, his hands clenched behind his back upon the unlucky sheaf, planted his feet firmly apart, cleared his throat, smiled first at Zita and then at Maria, but seemed in no hurry to begin.

"The signor wishes something?" Maria, con-

scious of her parent's interrupted rest, interrogated softly. Zita, just back of her tall daughter's shoulders, glared sullenly, half-awake, and blinking at the sunshine.

Somewhat disheartened at her expression, Dacre began in an ingratiating voice, "Si, Maria." Then he plunged. "The signor and the signora want your help — yes — and your mother's help — in a moment of great trouble."

Victoria turned admiring eyes upon her husband. Sympathy breathed from Maria's noble face and bearing, but Zita looked crossly sceptical.

"You see," Dacre went on hurriedly, but impressively, "we have had bad news—but very bad news." He waved the telegrams. Zita leaned forward, interest awakened in her face. "But most serious news," he repeated solemnly.

Zita crumpled up, her fat chin sinking on her breast. "Oh, la—la—la—" she wailed. "Thy father, or thy mother, is dead!" She hid her face in her hands.

"Not my parents," Dacre explained haltingly,
only my uncle and aunt — and — er — a few friends."

Zita's wail ended in a loud lamentation, as she sank down rocking in the doorway. "Dio di dios! Che horribile! Dead—dead—all dead—ay! ay! Dead! Che horribile!"

"Now you've been and gone and done it," Victoria exclaimed, jumping up. "She thinks she's the centre of some great catastrophe."

"So she is - "

"And she'll be furious when she knows she is n't. Servants always love that kind of thing. Hurry up. We've got to explain to her, quickly, and stop her awful moaning."

"Oh, I say," Dacre remonstrated, stepping forward. "Zita, you did not understand! Zita! Maria, will you kindly explain to your mother that no one is dead—no one. She misunderstood. My Italian is so bad."

Maria threw a superb look of compassion upon him and shrugged, looking down at her rocking relative.

"It's useless, signor. I cannot stop her."

"If you can't stop her, what will?" Dacre was desperate.

Maria smiled. "Wine, signor — or sweets, signor — or a pastry, signor."

"Wine!" Dacre was already dashing for the dining-room.

"But it's nearly three o'clock, Dacre," Victoria's despairing voice called after him.

"All right," he declared, reappearing. "Here's vermouth — chatreuse — crême de menthe — maraschino!"

At the sound of the magic syllables, Zita's moaning became quiet, and as Maria held a glass to her lips, she was sufficiently composed to drink its contents.

"You are better, Zita?" Victoria asked anxiously. "See! No one is dead. Only the signor's uncle and aunt and a few friends are coming here."

Zita raised her head with an expression of injured dignity. "Here, signora!"

"Here," Dacre said firmly. "Here, to-day, this very afternoon. And we must find beds for them — and food and fire— and wine. For five! Presto—presto!"

"You call that diplomatic!" Victoria cried.
"You have put your foot in it. She is raging.
Listen, Zita. Seest thou, it is quite easy. Only
five persons. Only five. That is, a little more

meat, a little more drink — and the beds! — and it is done," Victoria's tone was honeyed.

Maria, scenting danger, flung herself into the breach. "Certainly, my mother, all could be managed."

Zita rose slowly to her feet, swept her daughter aside with a wide gesture as she shook her head.

"Impossibile!" she said.

CHAPTER III

As the word fell in all its deep significance upon the warm silence of the terrace, the signor and signora gazed blankly at one another.

"In the annals of the Dacre-Carden family, there is no such word as fail," Victoria murmured.

"Quite," Dacre agreed. "The moment is desperate. It's a case for bribery and corruption. What shall I offer her?"

"Oh, anything." Victoria was reckless. "Begin with a hundred."

"No, fifty. But she looks adamant."

"It's the want of sleep, and besides, you cheated her out of a funeral or two."

"Well, she had all the sensations. Hang it! That's worth something. Suppose you retire with Maria and leave me here to fix the lady."

"I wish you joy of her," Victoria declared, as she picked up a basket and scissors and moved to the steps. Maria's eyes followed her miserably. "Come," Victoria said, over her shoulder. "I must get many flowers, Maria." She started down the steps. "Do your best, Dacre," she admonished.

As the mistress and the maid went snipping roses through the pergola, Dacre drew a note from his pocket and took a step towards the sullen figure in the door.

"You will have more work, Zita," he murmured. "A little present. All must be well done—beds and food and wine."

The fat hand closed over the money, the shoulders shrugged upwards, a pacified smile dawned on the fat face. She sighed. "Ah, Signor, what it is to serve a real gentleman! All shall be as well as it can be made. For fifty lire, Maria and her mother can do much! For a hundred lire, oh, signor, we could do all with perfection!"

Dacre shook his head, but a second note followed the first. "You understand, Zita," he said, withholding it for a second. "No more! This is enough — too much — and presto!"

"Presto!" Zita answered with a lazy smile, disclosing a row of white teeth, as, tucking the notes into her bodice, she turned back to the kitchen.

"Victoria," Dacre called gaily over the balustrade. "It is all right. Come back — or shall I come down to you in the garden?"

"I'm coming up." Victoria appeared, laden with roses of every hue. "We can do a lot with flowers," she explained, with the charming American belief in the power of flowers to express every feeling and fill every emergency. "We'll have heaps of them everywhere, and you must admit I do arrange them well." She emptied her basket on the table, and, running off, came back with bowls and vases, which she began to fill, under Dacre's admiring eyes. "Well, how much did you have to give her? Much?"

"Um - not much."

"That's lucky. Now we've just time to finish here and meet them at the boat. Then we'll take them to tea at Morgano's while the luggage is sent on here, and we won't get here till sunset, when it all looks most gorgeous, and that will give Zita and Maria time to have everything ready. We shall have cream of spinach soup, an

entrée, then a little leg of Naples lamb, and a sweet. Lots of flowers and fruit on the table. Breakfast we will have on the terrace. We must dash as soon as I get the flowers done. We'll only just have time to get down to the Grande Marina. It's rather fun, now I've got used to the idea."

Dacre laughed. She was very bewildering. "Yes, that's all right as far as the superficials go. But what about — beds?"

"Beds?" Victoria carefully arranged the roses in the bowl before her.

"Yes, that dull essential of hospitality."

Victoria laughed. "You are superior. If the truth be known, Maria has already gone to impress beds into the service. It is all arranged. This is how I've done it." She called them off on her fingers. "Uncle and aunt in the spare room—Sallie in your dressing-room—Jimmie in the garden-house—"

"What a brilliant idea! I didn't know there was a bed there."

"Yes, Maria says it is all quite nice. The people who had the villa last year used it for an extra bedroom."

"But what about Pott?"

"Pott shall have Maria's room."

"Share, did you say?"

"Dacre!"

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Carden!"

"Pott will have Maria's room, which is quite decent, and Maria will share her mother's room."

"You don't think we ought to give up our room?"

"I thought of that. But I don't think it is necessary. Aunt and uncle and Sallie will be perfectly comfortable, and it does n't matter if the two men have to rough it a little, does it? There!—are n't those roses gorgeous?" Victoria rose, with the great bowl in her hands. "They're going in the middle of the dinnertable. Do, Dacre, like a dear, stick these other jugs and vases about on the tables in the drawing-room, while I go and get my hat on. We have n't any time to waste."

Dacre watched her disappear into the house, and then dutifully did as he was asked. When he had finally placed all the flowers to his satisfaction and decided that the big room looked fairly decent, what with them and the books, he lighted his pipe.

"Nearly ready, Vic?" he called.

No answer. He tried again in higher key.

"Victoria! I suppose you know that aunt is a vegetarian, and that the sight of a joint on the table makes her ill?"

"Yes," came in muffled accents.

"Hatpins in her mouth," Dacre thought.
"Well," he called aloud, "what shall you do?
Have you enough for her to eat?"

There was a rustle, and Victoria appeared in the door, smiling under her flower-wreathed hat, drawing on a long pair of white gloves.

"Oh, come on," she said. "I can't be bothered with aunt's fads."

"Well, you may not have to be," Dacre said huffily; "for she often travels with her own supply of foods."

"Oh, Dacre, don't! It sounds too horrid. Like a dromedary. But I won't be nasty about aunt's fads, for I suppose the first maxim of the newlywed should be, 'Suffer in-laws gladly.' We are newly-wed, Dacre, my dear, dignified darling! I beseech you not to look in the direction of Zita

or the kitchen on the way out. Talk, laugh, act as if we were light-hearted and happy, and we don't give Zita an opening for a word. I know that's the way to manage her. Dacre! You are looking stony, and she has her eye on you from the kitchen—Oh, you stupid! There, I told you! It's too late. She is coming out—I knew it!"

They were halfway to the gate, when Victoria's despairing voice made the announcement. "Tell her we can't wait," she whispered hurriedly.

Dacre shook his head. "I dare n't," he said. "I tell you, Victoria; you walk on, and I'll overtake you. She wants me."

Victoria fixed him with a stern eye. "Did you give her much money?"

"A little," Dacre said weakly, and turned to meet the tyrant as his wife passed through the green door into the lane.

Zita was panting and flushed. "Ah, signor! How we work! Maria is not back from the market, and I have the beds to make, and no sheets! no blankets! no pillows! To make beds without, signor! Impossible!"

"What can be done?" Dacre was flurried. Zita hunched her smooth shoulders. "There is Signora Fracetelli at the Hôtel Pension Isar. She is a friend to me. She could send all — but, oh! signor, it will take much gold. And the work for me, and for my poor child, my little Maria, who is not strong!"

Already Dacre's hand was in his pocket.

"How much?" His question was laconic.

"To be not exorbitant, another little fifty lire, signor, and all shall be done as signor would command."

"Quite so, but this must be the last, Zita—the last extra payment. You understand?"

Tears stood in the fat woman's eyes. "Madonna mia! Signor, would I ask the signor for a cent? Did he not offer gratuity like a noble gentleman?"

"Quite so," Dacre exclaimed hurriedly.

"That's all right. Don't bother the signora,
you understand; and have everything ready
when we return."

Amidst a shower of blessings he gained the gate, and hurried down the steep, rough lane. Around the first turning he met Maria, mounting with her stately step, a mountain of bed-clothes upon her head. A little farther on, he

caught up to Victoria, who turned a gay face to greet him.

"Did you meet Maria with the bedclothes? Is n't it quaint? She has borrowed everything from a friend, who will take no payment. Is n't it odd?"

"Very," Dacre answered drily.

CHAPTER IV

THE Naples steamer, bearing its usual load of tourists, steamed into the bay at Capri, slowed down and stopped amidst the usual Babel of yelling boatmen and shouted orders.

To the Cardens, waiting on the breakwater for the arrival of their guests, the disembarkment into the small boats seemed very slow. Dacre grew rather nervous as the first two boats drew in, but disgorged only strangers.

"Hope they got off all right. It's rather a tricky business in a sea. Hate to have Uncle James knocked about. Hullo! Somebody waving to you in this boat. By Jove, a pretty girl!"

"It's Sallie! Bless her heart! Ah, it is nice to see some one from home. Oh, is n't she sweet! Sallie! Sallie!"

The boatman brought the heavy boat skilfully in to the stone steps, and before any of the gentlemen of varied nationalities who were waiting with extended hands could aid her, a tall girl in a dark-blue travelling-dress sprang out and with a glad cry caught Victoria in her arms. Dacre came in for a mixture of introduction and greeting, and took an instant liking to the young woman whose grey eyes questioned him so levelly.

"She's a sportsman," he said to himself. "What a ripping face!"

Sallie meanwhile dealt with the customs in fluent Italian, and then turned to Victoria. "That's all. Was n't it splendid that I got an extra cheque from home? Just after I wrote to you. So I said, I'll spend it on going to see them at Capri. And here I am! What are we waiting for? That's all my luggage."

A rapid glance passed between the Cardens.

"We are waiting for some other people who are coming by this boat," Victoria explained. "Dacre's uncle and aunt, and their vicar, Mr. Pott, and — er — Jimmie Saunders, a painter friend of Dacre's."

"Good gracious, my child!" Sallie exclaimed.
"Have I put my foot in it? Have you room for me?"

"Heaps."

"Rather. Lots of room."

"But what fun!" Sallie went on. "Oh, I

have been so amused on the boat coming over by the quaintest English lady, who would talk to me about the suffrage. She had a nice old husband very much under her thumb, and very much disturbed at being out of his native element. Oh, here they are in the boat. That one in the purple and pink bonnet, with her arms full of packages. She would n't let me help her with them. She has a loaf of English bread in that silk bag. And that's a tin of Horace Biles' vegetarian biseuits under her arm, which she was eating to keep her from being seasiek. Good gracious! where's your husband going?"

"Oh, Sallie," Victoria answered, in a voice charged with laughter, "it's his aunt. It's his Aunt Clara — Mrs. Burrough-Gosseley. But what is happening? What are they all so angry about? That must be the parson."

As the boat touched the landing, a German student leaping off struck the shoulder of Reverend Pott, who, still pale from a slight tossing in the Bay of Naples, stood in the way, unhappily clutching his umbrella.

"Ilest scandaloo!" the clergyman announced, in a loud voice, under the impression that an at-

tempt at French would better express his feelings to the polyglot crowd than plain English.

"Scandalous! Not half as scandalous, sir, as the behaviour of my own countrymen in foreign lands." The speaker, who gazed down upon the clergyman from his great height of six-feet-two, was a broad-shouldered Englishman, dressed in shabby tweeds, with a rucksack and painting traps slung on his shoulders. "If I'd been that German, I'd have ducked you, sir. You know you took his sister's place in this boat."

"His sister, sir! I know nothing of the sort, sir! I saw a lady, a woman, pushing towards this boat, and she addressed me in that jargon which I do not understand, nor wish to. So I merely

put her aside and followed my friends."

"And quite right, vicar," Mrs. Burrough-Gosseley's indignant voice declared. "This is certainly a very forward person." She turned her back upon him as he jumped off. "James, the vicar was quite right to accompany us in this boat. Ah, there is dear Dacre! But why is that person slapping Dacre on the back? A most objectionable character. Ah, Dacre dear, at last! And where is dear Victoria? I see. Above there,

with a friend, you say? No, I'll just wait a minute and see that all my things get off safely. James! Have you the hot-water bottles? We carry them, Dacre, because we have them put in our beds as soon as we arrive, and it saves unpacking. Vicar, you have the thermos and the air-cushions?"

"Yes, and my umbrella," the vicar answered plaintively.

"Yes, those are all ours. We have sixteen pieces in all, porter. Oh, he speaks no English! What is sixteen in Italian? Very well, James, I will leave it to Dacre, then, but don't blame me if anything is lost. *Please* be careful of that package there, because it contains proteid jellies, which I brought as a little present to Victoria."

She accepted Dacre's assistance to leave the boat, followed by the vicar and Uncle James, who, as he gripped his nephew's hand, whispered a hurried "Safe thus far, my boy!"

As the four mounted the steps of the breakwater, Aunt Clara experienced a shock, for she beheld her niece Victoria, the future Mrs. Gosseley of Gosseley Hall, in familiar conversation with the objectionable character who had so insulted the vicar.

"Oh, Aunt Clara!" Victoria's voice rang with welcome as she came forward, "and dear Uncle James! And this, of course, is Mr. Pott, who sent us the lovely inkstand. How do you do? Aunt Clara, this is my friend, Miss Radford."

"Oh!" Aunt Clara exclaimed. "We have met before! How extraordinary! What a very small world this is! We talked coming over on the boat, Victoria. James, this is the lady I spoke of to you just now."

"How do you do," said Mr. Burrough-Gosseley, returning Sallie's frank smile.

"And this, Aunt Clara, is Dacre's friend, Mr. Saunders, the painter."

Jimmie bowed low, and as Mrs. Burrough-Gosseley was seized with a sudden, unaccountable fit of coughing, Victoria hurried her party towards the carriages.

"Now we are all introduced," she said, talking very rapidly. "Sallie, you and Mr. Saunders shall take care of Uncle James. Dacre, you and Mr. Pott shall go next, and Aunt Clara and I will bring up the rear. We are all going up to Mor-

gano's for tea. It is such a quaint place. I am sure you will all love it. Everything has cats on it, you know. Don't you love cats, Mr. Pott? Hurry up, Dacre dear."

They arrived at the end of the breakwater, and were met by the shouting vociferations of the whip-cracking, brigandish drivers, drawn up in their smart little vetturinos along the curb. Victoria's voice was almost drowned by the noise. Dacre had just succeeded in starting Sallie, Uncle James, and the painter in the first carriage, and was congratulating himself when Aunt Clara rent the air with a shrill cry.

"My bag, Dacre! You know, my little black bag!"

"What bag?" Dacre asked, bewildered. "The whole sixteen pieces were there, you know."

"Ah, yes," the vicar said hurriedly, in an oppressed voice. "But dear Mrs. Gosseley does not include her small black bag among the number. It is personal."

"Run, Dacre! Run after your uncle and stop him. Tell him I have lost my small black bag. I know I put it somewhere most carefully, but I can't remember where." Dacre cast one look at his aunt's agitated face, above which the purple and pink bonnet lurched rakishly to one side, and sped up the white road after the carriage.

"Uncle James! Uncle James!" His voice was finally heard, and the carriage came to a standstill, and the occupants, leaning out, waited for him to come up, panting.

"Sorry," he said. "But aunt has lost her little black bag. Have you seen it?"

Uncle James leaned over the side of the carriage. "Tell your aunt," he whispered, behind his hand, "that she secured her handbag with safety-pins somewhere about her person before we left Naples. It is probably there still."

"Right," said Dacre. "Drive on."

CHAPTER V

"You go next, Dacre," Victoria said, "and take good care of Mr. Pott. Mr. Pott, I hope your nerves are steady, for these coachmen drive like mad."

"I am recovering, my dear lady," the Reverend Pott announced pompously, as he climbed into a carriage. "I am recovering. My nerves have, I own, suffered somewhat this last hour"; and he glared at the painter's back as the carriage ahead vanished in a cloud of dust round a bend in the ascending road, and raised his hat as he and Dacre drove off.

Aunt Clara's search, meanwhile, conducted by means of surreptitious pats, had resulted in the finding of her lost property. So it was with a relieved smile that she allowed Victoria to settle her in the little carriage and take a seat by her side.

"Avanti!" Victoria cried. The driver cracked his whip prodigiously, the mettlesome little horse sprang forward, and the vehicle, swaying and rocking, tore up the hill. But, if the coachman had hoped to frighten the elderly Englishwoman, he was disappointed. Aunt Clara did not turn a hair, but, bending a kindly look on the pretty picture at her side, began:—

"And how are you, and Dacre? And how is your mother? Missing you very much, I suppose?"

"Oh, no. She is having a very good time. She is at Cannes now, where you ought to be — I mean, where you had planned to go. You can't think what a pleasure it is to have you here — and Dacre is so delighted."

"And how are you two children? Very happy? Not tired of each other yet? As Miss McAll was saying only last week, the honeymoon is the crucial time in married life."

"How does she know?" Victoria hazarded flippantly.

"She has a most wide grasp of the subject, my dear. In fact, one might say that Miss Mc-All is in the vanguard of all modern thought. Oh, Victoria, I have not half time to tell you the story at present, but suffice it to say that her energies are under restraint for a time"—her

voice sank to a sepulchral whisper; "she is—in jail! And I, your aunt, might have shared her glorious fate, had not your uncle been taken suddenly and unexpectedly ill in the train on his way to London, when I was journeying up to that very meeting. Of course, they are going on a hunger strike, and she, Miss McAll I mean, believes that she will be able to hold out longer than any of the others, because she has already reduced her daily food to an almost imperceptible minimum."

"How clever of her," Victoria interjected absently.

"Well, my dear, when I found that your uncle's health forbade my staying on in town, yet knowing how he dislikes the Riviera, I thought of Italy, as we had just had your letter, with its kind invitation, forwarded from Gosseley. So we left by the night train, and here we are. It is certainly strange, but your uncle has been better from the moment we left London. There was a noticeable improvement in his spirits almost at once, and he was quite bright even crossing the channel. Of course, since I have become a disciple of the Pure Food Movement—

combined, dear, with Higher Thought — the sea has no terrors for me. Not that it ever had, to be quite honest, but these things do make such a difference. I hope, dear, that your Uncle James has not kept his mouth open driving up here. The smells, you know. It's quite interesting, Victoria, these vineyards and little shrines and peasants. Yet how thankful we should be that we are English! Such poverty, dear, and dirt, and — and superstition! Your uncle's throat is very sensitive to smells — and even when he was sleeping for those few nights over the stables, his throat was quite bad. Miss McAll suggested that he should wear a respirator if he came abroad, but James was really vexed."

"I should think so, auntie!" Victoria exclaimed. "Poor Uncle James! And where did you join Mr. Pott?"

"Oh, that was odd! You know the saying 'How small the world is!' We had just arrived at our hotel in Rome, and were seeing our bags upstairs, when who should walk into the hall but Mr. Pott! James was delighted to see him, which surprised me, as you know your uncle has never found him very congenial in Wimford.

All because, my dear, Mr. Pott is not what your uncle calls a sportsman. Yet I assure you that he shook his hand there in the hall of the hotel as if he were his oldest friend! Mr. Pott, it seems, was travelling in a Cook's tour, and left his party that night to dine with your uncle. I retired early, being rather tired, and I understand that he and your uncle sat up rather late, discussing foreign ways, and that Mr. Pott, on coming down the next morning, later than was his wont, found that the Cook's party had left at seven o'clock without him! He was most upset, and inclined to suggest that it was your Uncle James's fault. Your Uncle James, at the same time, was a little upset over settling his bill at the desk, which really was exorbitant, and there was a little scene. It ended, however, by your uncle apologising for his heated remarks, and begging Mr. Pott to join us. After all, as I tell James, he is the vicar of our village. Any little courtesy we can show him will not come amiss. I hope that it is not inconveniencing you to put him up?"

"Oh, not at all," Victoria answered hastily.
"We are so glad to have you all."

"But I understood there was only one spare room, my dear."

"Oh, it's quite a big villa, Aunt Clara. Though the rooms are n't all as nice as we should like them to be. But Sallie does n't mind, nor Dacre's friend, Jimmie Saunders, either."

"Nice girl, your young friend. I found her with an open mind. I wish I could say as much for that artist fellow."

"Why, has n't he an open mind?" Victoria inquired innocently.

"I speak not of his mind, but of his manners, my dear."

"Dacre says he's splendid, Aunt Clara. Oh, there they all are, waving to us from the terrace of the caffè. See! The Bay of Naples below us, and Vesuvius there, and tea is waiting for us above."

"Delightful," said Aunt Clara; "but unfortunately I don't drink tea now. I hate to be a kill-joy, my dear. But of late I have taken to Dibble's Vi-tæ. If I could retire for a moment and get it out of my handbag, doubtless the waiter would get me a little hot water to dissolve it—the pellet I refer to."

"Sure," Victoria said hastily. "Hullo, Dacre!" as they drove up to the terrace.

As she sprang out, her quick eye took in the essentials of the situation. Sallie carrying on an animated conversation with Uncle James; Jimmie Saunders leaning on the balustrade, carelessly rolling a cigarette; while the Reverend Pott, Vicar of Wimford, regarded the painter with a cold and condescending eye.

CHAPTER VI

TEA, skilfully engineered by Victoria, went off uneventfully. "I hope you don't mind," she said as they rose from the little tables, "but we can't drive to the villa. The streets are so narrow and rough that we have to walk."

"Very salutary exercise," the vicar said.

"Very good for us, my dear," Aunt Clara agreed. "I for one feel quite refreshed after my cup of Vi-tæ, though I do not think that the many rich cakes which you young people have eaten are very good food. They have none of the essential properties."

"Oh, but they are so pink and pretty!" Victoria declared, as she led the way with Uncle James up a steep cobbled lane, followed by the rest in procession. "It is not really as far as it seems," she explained to them apologetically.

"I am sure," Jimmie declared gaily, "that it won't seem as far as it is. Anyway, Mrs. Dacre, no road can ever be too long in Italy."

"Indeed! Why is that?" Aunt Clara asked,

with the air of one seeking for useful information.

"Perhaps because all roads lead to Rome," Jimmie said, smiling.

"It is doubtful whether that is really a fact, dear Mrs. Gosseley," the vicar said in a ponderous aside.

"Is it that," Sallie said, taking up Jimmie's thread, "or is n't it rather that they have the air of going nowhere—?"

"Or anywhere," said Dacre.

"Certainly, the vagueness of anywhere is even more seductive than Rome," Jimmie agreed.

"The Vagueness of Anywhere!" Aunt Clara repeated indignantly, turning to the vicar.

"Better than Rome, dear Mrs. Gosseley! Better than Rome, with all its store of useful knowledge and sacred associations." He shook his head with pursed lips.

"I hope you are not tired," Victoria called, turning around. "We are nearly there, and I warn you that Dacre will expect a certain amount of rapturous surprise when you behold his carved green doorway. He is frightfully proud of his carved green doorway. Oh, here we are!"

The sight of the small green door in the wall

called forth a chorus of varied exclamations, from the painter's hearty "Ripping!" to Mr. Pott's "How very un-English!"

"What a delightful place!" Aunt Clara exclaimed. "Most picturesque, but, I fear, rather unhygienic. Are you sure the drains, Dacre, -"

"Now, Aunt Clara," Dacre said firmly, "you

are not to worry. It is quite all right."

"Stunning!" Jimmie murmured, as they passed through to the terrace. "Simply stunning!"

"How beautiful! It's just like a house in a book," Sallie said.

"Capital, Dacre," Uncle James announced.

"I am so glad you all like it," Victoria cried. "Now we must show you your rooms. Let me see: Sallie, come with me, and I'll show Uncle and Aunt and Mr. Pott where they are; and, Dacre, you take Mr. Saunders to his quarters. You won't mind a small room, Mr. Pott?" Victoria asked as they disappeared into the house.

"Come on, old chap," Dacre said, turning to Jimmie. "Your quarters are in the garden. Hope you don't mind."

"Not at all. That'll do me top-hole," Jimmie answered.

"The fact is," Dacre said, leading the way down the terrace steps, "when we wrote to you, we did not expect such a crowd. So we are rather put to it for room. But I think you will be all right in this little house. It is only one room, so you'll at least have it all to yourself. Victoria says the bed's comfortable, so I think you will sleep well. There — this window looks up to the villa, and the other one over the bay. Now, have you got everything you want?"

"Go on, you old fool!" Jimmie said, looking up from his rucksack. "Putting on airs and playing the married host! If you mean dress-clothes, I haven't got any. I can change m' shirt and brush m' teeth, but that's all. You are an extraordinarily lucky fellow," he went on. "Considering what a prize idiot you always were, you have done the first sensible thing in marrying your wife."

"Thanks," Dacre said laconically. "I didn't know you'd noticed Victoria."

"What d' you mean?" said Jimmie.

"Never you mind," said Dacre. "You get into your nice clean shirt, and soap your little hands and face, and buck up."

CHAPTER VII

"AT last!" Victoria cried, closing the door of the dressing-room upon herself and Sallie. "I've been dying for a talk with you ever since the boat got in. Dacre says it's time to dress for dinner now, but never mind. It is such fun to see you again. I'm afraid they have n't unpacked your things, but I've only got two maids. Let me help."

"You shall do nothing of the kind," Sallie declared. "Just perch yourself on the bed and rest while you have a chance. It looks to me as if there was a strenuous time ahead for you, with this party on your hands, if you don't mind my saying so."

Victoria laughed, swinging her feet. "It is funny," she said in a ruminative voice.

"Funny?" Sallie looked up from her box. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing," Victoria said hastily. "Do tell me how you like Jimmie Saunders, and isn't Uncle James a dear?" "Yes, as nice as he can be. Do you know"— Sallie paused with her arms full of *chiffons*—"I am sure that I have met Mr. Saunders before somewhere— Awfully funny; his face and his voice are so familiar." There was a little puzzled line between her eyes.

"He's a great friend of Dacre's," Victoria said. "He's always talking about him. He says he's awfully clever. He's quite an absurd person, always doing things no one else would think of doing. And yet he's quite all right, you know; awfully good family and all that."

Sallie looked up with a laugh. "Why paint the lily?" she said.

"And Pott!" Victoria hugged herself.

"But why did you ever ask him?"

"We didn't, exactly," Victoria began.—
"Oh, Sallie, what a sweet dress!"

"My only one," Sallie declared cheerfully.

"You always look nicer in your few things," Victoria said generously, "than the rest of us with all our clothes."

"Clothes make me think of your mother," Sallie said. "I suppose she simply hated having you go."

"Um-m-m," Victoria demurred. "Mother thinks she misses me more than she really does, I think. She is so absurdly young herself, you know. She really is young, and she feels young, and she looks younger. No—I think she will enjoy this winter immensely, and I hope she will, because she has been perfectly lovely to me."

"Is Center Hodgson —"

"Yes, the millionaire. He has been perfectly devoted to mother for years, and now he is giving her an awfully good time. She is staying on his yacht with a big party, and they are all simply going it. Between you and me, Sallie, I call the Riviera the paradise of the parvenu. Any one can pick up a title or two there to garnish any occasion. It is funny."

"Isn't it?" Sallie said quietly. "But, after all, I shouldn't think your mother cared much for that kind of thing."

"Oh, no," Victoria said carelessly; "she does n't really, but it amuses her. I like her to have her fling; then, you see, she will go back to Schuylkill and end her days in the old house as all the family for generations have done."

"I wonder," Sally said.

"Oh, there's Dacre calling me. I'm not going yet. I can change in two shakes of a lamb's tail. All right, Dacre, all right!" she called. "But I suppose I must go. Oh, have you noticed the way the vicar glares at Jimmie Saunders? I'm afraid they don't hit it off very well."

"Hit it off!" Sallie exclaimed. "My dear, I wish you could have seen them on the boat coming over. It was antagonism at first sight. Mr. Pott was looking very green and dejected, holding his umbrella. Mr. Saunders was pacing the deck, looking very cheerful and pleased with himself, and somehow tripped over it, and nearly fell down. They glared at each other. Mr. Saunders waited for the vicar to apologise - I was watching it all. 'Well, sir?' he said finally, when Mr. Pott said nothing. 'Well, sir!' said Mr. Pott. 'Why don't you leave your umbrella at home on a day like this?' Mr. Pott looked perfectly furious. 'Sir,' he said, 'I never venture forth without my umbrella!' And then there was a sudden lurch, and the vicar looked greener still, and, as a finishing touch, Mr. Saunders unintentionally did just the meanest thing he could —he laughed, and then went on with his walk. I

was watching it over my book, and was awfully amused."

"Yes," said Victoria, "and then they had that row just as the boat got in."

"Oh, your Uncle James tried to explain that to Mr. Saunders on the way up in the carriage."

"Oh, darn! There's Dacre calling again. All right, I'm coming! Gracious! He says I've only five minutes to dress for dinner. Never mind. It's sure to be late. The servants are n't used to so many, and are rather flustered. Shall I do you up before I go? Oh, white is becoming to you, Sallie. If you want any roses, there are plenty in the drawing-room, or else cut some on the terrace. You'll have plenty of time before I'm ready. There — Good-bye."

CHAPTER VIII

The sun, which was near its setting, cast lengthening shadows across the terrace floor as Sallie came out of the long window. She stood for a moment, seized by the beauty of the late afternoon. Half a dozen brightly-cushioned chairs and a table stood near her. Beyond, upon the low stone balustrade, terra-cotta pots of simple shape overflowed with bloom. She walked to the end of the terrace, where a climbing rose made vivid splashes of colour against the warm cream of the wall. Overlooking the wealth of flowers within her reach, she stood on tiptoe, endeavouring unsuccessfully to reach a more perfect bloom which hung above her head.

"Half a mo', Miss Radford. I'll pull that down for you." It was Jimmie Saunders's voice, as he came up the terrace steps.

"Oh, thank you. I've set my heart on that big rose, and I just can't reach it."

"'Roses, roses all the way.' Did you ever see anything like them?" he asked.

"'And myrtle mixed in my path like mad," she quoted. "I never have, Mr. Saunders. Oh, thank you. It was worth reaching for, was n't it?"

"Yes, doubly worth it," he said, looking laughingly down at her as she fastened it in her dress. There was silence for a moment. When Sallie looked up, he was still gazing at her.

"Well?" she said.

He shook his head. "I was only thinking."

"Thinking?"

"Oh, I dare n't tell you what."

"Dare n't? I should n't have looked for lack of courage in you." She laughed.

"Discretion, you know —"

"Oh, but that's such a tiresome proverb."

"Yes, but so many proverbs are. They are framed for sensible men to ignore."

"Then, begin at once."

"No one has ever accused me of being sensible. Ask Dacre."

"Oh, I'll take your word for it."

Jimmie chuckled, then turned on her suddenly. "You sing, don't you?"

"How do you know?"

"Well, if I must be honest, Mrs. Carden told me at tea. Somehow, one does n't have to be told, though, when one loves music. Will you sing for us this evening?"

"Perhaps; or if not this evening, another evening, if you'd like. I'm not quite sure that I could sing to-night before—"

"Quite so." There was a pause as they walked towards the balustrade.

"But, if I promise to sing for you, you must tell me what you were thinking," Sallie said abruptly.

"Now you're tempting me. If you keep your promise I shall win, in any case, more than I lose," he said slowly. "It is a promise?"

"Yes," she said. "Oh, look at that pot!"

"Good gracious, Miss Radford, you gave me a shock! I thought you meant the vicar."

"But is n't it a lovely oleander?"

"And certainly has a pleasanter expression than our friend." His tone was oddly quizzical.

She looked at him quickly. "Yes," she said to herself. "I am sure of it." She hesitated, her eyes questioning his. "So am I," he said. "But I know where, and you don't."

"Don't I?" she repeated slowly, smiling.

He laughed a little ruefully. "It did n't take me so long. I remembered as soon as I saw you. But that is only to be expected."

She coloured slowly.

"Six years ago, Miss Radford." His voice was low.

"You need n't tell me," she said. "I remembered as soon as you made that idiotic remark about the vicar. You were always poking fun at somebody."

"Yes," he said with a sigh. "How young we were!"

"What delightful pots of flowers these are." It was the vicar's voice. "I have never seen them grow in such luxuriance except once, and that was in the conservatory of my friend, the Duke of Gossex. Beautiful, are they not, Miss Radford?"

"Lovely," Sallie agreed, as the vicar joined her. "We were just speaking of them."

CHAPTER IX

"Он, my dear Dacre," Victoria cried as she and Dacre came out upon the terrace a moment later, "do go to the rescue. Your friend Jimmie is simply glaring at the vicar. We have got our hands full with these two and Aunt Clara. You know she talked suffrage to Sallie all the way over in the boat and to me coming up in the carriage. Oh, do look at Mr. Pott's air of devotion."

"Jove!" said Dacre, heading for Sallie's side.
"To see him in Wimford, you'd never suspect he was such a dog. This Capri air always has a demoralising effect, they say."

"I am sorry to appear like this, in flannels," Jimmie said, bowing to his hostess, "but I had no idea when you asked me that you would have so many guests, and tramping, you know, one can't carry dress-clothes."

"Oh, it's quite all right," Victoria answered.

"Dacre never dresses, though he thinks he always does!"

"Well, he's dressed to-night."

"Oh, that's to show Uncle James that we have not yet succumbed to the demoralising influence of the Continent."

"From Dacre's letter, you know, I imagined this a small villa, with one little prophet's chamber which you called the spare room; and here I find you entertaining a house-party."

"Tut, tut, don't be peevish," Dacre said, hearing the last words as he strolled up. "Oh, here comes aunt."

Mrs. Burrough-Gosseley, attired in a purple satin tea-gown, advanced majestically, a bottle in her hand, a tin box beneath her arm, followed by her husband.

"Victoria, my dear, we have hurried, as we did not wish to miss a minute of this beautiful scene. I should indeed like Miss Pott to see this view. She is so truly artistic. Vicar, would n't your sister love this view?"

The vicar, thus addressed, turned from Miss Radford's side and the party drew together into one group, Jimmie on the outskirts, towering above them, smoking a cigarette. The beauty of the hour was so great that it caught them all in a web of silence.

"The sky is like the inside of some wonderful seashell," Sallie said finally, in a hushed voice; "and even the air seems quivering with rose and gold." Her eyes met Jimmie's, bent upon her. She smiled, shaking her head deprecatingly. "We are tyros," she said. "It must mean much more to you."

"Enough," he answered laconically.

Mr. Pott's voice broke in, precise. "Yes, my sister would indeed enjoy this scene. As you know, dear Mrs. Gosseley, she is a favourite pupil of Sir Luke Meader, R.A. I may say that she has met the best artistic society in London at his house, though Lucy is not, as you may judge, of a Bohemian disposition."

"Unhappy girl!"

Mr. Pott turned quickly. The painter was gazing out to sea, over the olive trees, a smile crinkling the corners of his eyes. Mr. Pott's expression was severe.

"My sister is no longer a girl, sir, and I consider your remark distinctly misplaced."

"Oh, Mr. Pott," Victoria exclaimed, throwing an imploring glance at Dacre, who edged up to Jimmie, "I was so interested in what aunt told me of your sister's travels in Spain. She must have had a delightful time."

"My dear young lady, she did. But what is this? Surely you have no other guests arriving?"

"Dacre, look! Maria is bringing somebody's bag. Could anything have been left behind at the boat?"

"Probably," Dacre said. "Here, Maria. Let's have a look. Where did it come from?"

"A man left it at the gate, signor. He says it is for the Prince."

"Prince? What man? What prince? There must be some mistake."

"He looked like a mécanicien, signor."

Dacre inspected the label, amid a breathless silence. "His Excellency Prince Salzikoff, Villa Felice, Capri," he read aloud.

"A prince!" said the Reverend Pott, settling his eyeglasses. "How very interesting to have a prince as a visitor!"

"Oh, no," said Victoria hurriedly; "there is some mistake. Perhaps there is another Villa Felice on the Island."

"Of course," said Dacre, in a tone of relief.
"That must be it."

But the Reverend Pott was already turning the label in his hand.

"Not at all," he cried triumphantly. "It is on the other side, 'Care Dacre Carden, Esq.'" He straightened himself up. "Very gratifying," he said.

"But it really cannot be for us," Victoria insisted, "unless it is one of Sallie's numerous retinue who has followed her here."

"No, no," Dacre interrupted. "Of course, it's a patron of the arts, one of Jimmie's rich clients."

"No, I can't claim it," Jimmie declared. "Vicar, it must be a friend of yours. Church and State, you know."

The vicar, with a deprecating hand, denied the impeachment.

"And all this time, dear, Maria is waiting to know what to do with the bag. Aunt Clara, what would you do?"

"Return it to the man, my dear."

"But the man has gone. Besides, it says to our care," Dacre objected.

"I should advise having it placed in the house," the vicar vouchsafed. "It can do no

harm, and seems more courteous to the titled owner."

"Titled fiddlesticks!" Jimmie growled under his breath. Sallie, catching his eye, laughed. He joined her. "Dear old England, Miss Radford!" he said.

Maria lifted the bag and walked across the terrace with her superb and stately poise.

"What do you think of our goddess?" Dacre said, turning. "Is n't she stunning, Jimmie?"

But Jimmie did not hear. The vicar, rubbing his hands as he gazed after the retreating figure of the girl, answered.

"Amazing," he said. "Simply amazing."

"Something seems to have happened to dinner," Victoria said nervously. "I am afraid that the arrival of the bag has demoralised our staff. I think I must run in and see what has happened." She disappeared, followed a moment later by her husband, who met her as she came out of the kitchen.

"Look here," he said; "something must be done. Things are n't going very well. Profound gloom on the terrace." "I know. Is n't it awful! Zita says dinner won't be ready for at least half an hour."

"What can be done?"

"I have it, Dacre! Give them all a cocktail. That'll buck them up."

"Do you think it would do? You know Aunt Clara's views on these things; and Pott would n't like it."

"Then Pott must pass it, but I guess he won't," Victoria answered. "We need n't call it a cocktail."

"Leave that to me," Dacre said.

"Hurry, Dacre. Hurry and mix it. A good stiff one all around. I'll go out and keep them going. Oh, you poor things!" she went on, as she came out on the terrace and found her guests seated in a silent row. "I know that you are all starving. But we shall really have dinner in a few minutes, and Dacre's bringing you out a little American drink. I want you all to try it for my sake. The receipt is one we have had in the family since the days of the Mayflower."

"The Mayflower!" Sallie echoed wonderingly,
"I did n't know —" but she caught Victoria's
eye as Dacre appeared with a tray of small

glasses. "Oh!" she exclaimed, as she lifted hers, "that old Puritan drink! Do you know it, Mr. Saunders?"

Jimmie turned the glass in his fingers. "I seem to remember all except the cherry."

"But that's a most important part," Victoria declared. "So symbolic. It began with Washington, you know."

Aunt Clara was turning her glass under her nose. "My dear, I don't think—I don't know that I ought— Vicar, what do you think?"

"The vicar did n't stop to think," Jimmie chuckled.

"Now, Aunt Clara, you really must," Victoria insisted, "or I shall be awfully hurt. It's quite harmless, is n't it, Uncle James?"

"Quite, my dear; a most excellent mixture."

"Well," said Aunt Clara, with a sigh, "just this once, as a preventive, and as a little compliment to you, my dear, though it smells to me slightly intoxicating."

"This is a very pleasant land, a lotus-land," the vicar said in a dreamy voice, as he lay back in his chair with a smile upon his face. "I think I will break through my rule and join you in a cigarette, Mr. Saunders."

"Delighted," Jimmie said, meeting Dacre's astonished eye quizzically, as he hastily passed his case.

CHAPTER X

"This is what I call a very pleasant little party," the squire ejaculated benignly, a few minutes later. "Just enough of us to make things go. What is it, Vicar? What are you looking at?"

The Reverend Pott rose slowly to his feet, a fixed expression in his eyes, which were raised to the sky. "Don't — don't — d — don't you see it?" he stammered.

Jimmie chuckled.

"Where, dear Vicar? What?" Aunt Clara demanded, while the Cardens exchanged meaning glances.

"Yonder. A spot — a spot — a moving spot."

"Enjoying yourself, Vicar?" Jimmie drawled.

Mr. Pott glared at him. "I tell you, sir, I do see a spot yonder in the sky, high above the headland."

"By Jove!" Dacre exclaimed. "He's right."

"And I see it, too," Aunt Clara declared. "It must be a large Southern bird."

"A bird? A balloon," said Mr. Pott.

"I am convinced it's a bird," Aunt Clara insisted.

"But can't you see, dear madam, the pendent basket?"

"No, dear Vicar, I cannot. I distinctly see its wings. I am convinced it is a bird."

"A humming bird, then, my dear," the squire said, with a twinkle, "for I can hear the burr of the propeller."

"An aeroplane! An aeroplane!" Victoria cried, clapping her hands. "How awfully exciting!"

"And heading straight for us. It will pass over our heads if it keeps its course," Dacre declared.

"What a wonder!" said Jimmie, squinting up with half-closed eyes. "It's mounting. How big it looks, already! Jove! it's terrifying."

"It is," said Sallie, in an awed voice.

"And look," cried Aunt Clara, "at the two little wheels below its body. It's just over our heads."

Suddenly the purring of the propeller stopped.

"Oh, what a terrible popping noise!" Aunt Clara cried, clapping her hands to her ears. "Oh, James, I fear something is broken. They're falling! They're falling! Oh! Oh!"

"No," said Dacre. "Don't be frightened. They've seen our plateau, and are planing down. It's about the only level spot on the island."

"Hurrah!" cried Victoria. "An aeroplane always goes to my head. I must run out and watch it. Oh, let's all go. Let's all go! Look at it circle! It's simply stunning. Oh, come, every one!" She picked up her scarf, which had fallen, and ran down the steps, followed by the whole party, breathless and expectant. "This way," she called back; "through the olive grove and across the lane. If we run, we can see it come down."

"Too late, I am afraid, for that," Dacre called as he passed her; "but come on, anyway. By Jove!" he exclaimed, as he and Jimmie arrived together at the open space. "Look at that! He has brought her down magnificently. We're in luck. What a crew of mechanics! He must have marked his spot to have them waiting for him here. I wonder who he is."

"He's just getting out," Jimmie said, as Sallie and Victoria caught up to them. "Who?" Victoria panted.

"That's what we want to know," Dacre said. "Hullo! The passenger's a lady. Pretty plucky!"

"Oh, what fun! She's waving to us!" Victoria cried, waving her scarf in answer. "I should be so cocky if I'd done that that I should want to wave at anybody. Dacre, the man is bowing to you. What amusing people! Oh, Sallie, is n't it fun? Oh, Aunt Clara, do look at the lady. She's getting out. Yes, the gentleman is talking to Dacre. Great Scott! Aunt Clara! Aunt Clara! Did you see? Dacre kissed her! Dacre! Dacre! Why, it can't be! Yes, it is! It's mamma! It's mamma!"

She rushed forward to meet the lady who came towards them, chattering fast to Dacre and to the airman.

"You dear thing, Victoria," the lady cried.
"No wonder you did n't recognize me with these goggles and this great hood. Oh, Victoria, it's simply ideal! I've just had the time of my life. Oh, Mrs. Gosseley, so pleased to meet you, and Mr. Gosseley. But this is most unexpected. And Sallie Radford! What are you doing here? Oh, my dear Victoria, you must do it. You simply must. There is nothing like it. It's the greatest

thing on earth. The Prince — Oh, Prince, let me introduce you. Prince Salzikoff, my little daughter, Mrs. Dacre Carden, and all the rest of the crowd. I'm too excited to present you all, as I'd mix you up. Victoria, the Prince is the most marvellous aeronaut—airman I mean. But I'll explain all that on our way to the villa. We are simply dying for food. Flying makes you awfully hungry. I could eat for six." She put her arm through Victoria's, and drew her, still talking, towards the villa.

"Has the Prince's bag come? Ah, that's good. I knew that you had a spare room for me, and I thought that Dacre could fix the Prince up somewhere. Gee whiz, Victoria, it's simply bully! But, of course, you want to know how I happen to be here. We got fed up with the Riviera and Mr. Hodgson, and the Prince wanted to attend the flying week at Milan. But I expect you saw that was off; so we changed our plans and landed at Naples yesterday. I was dying to come on and see you at once, but I was determined, from the minute the Prince asked me, to give you this surprise. So we lay off his villa at Sorrento last night, and we expected to come over



NO WONDER YOU DID N'T RECOGNISE ME WITH THESE GOGGLES



this morning, till the brilliant idea struck me of getting here just in time for dinner. Now, Victoria, are n't you pleased? Is n't it just too much fun for anything? You know, we are dressed! Under this big coat I've got on my little cerise frock, and the Prince is dressed, too. I have got my nightie and my morning things in this small handbag, and the Prince sent his little pim-jams in the other bag. He's perfectly sweet, Victoria, and one of the oldest titles in Russia — and rich, my dear!! There's nothing that man doesn't have. But besides all that, he's square, the right sort, Victoria." She stopped for breath, then rushed on. "Well, my dear, you look very well. What a cunning little villa! Are you sure you can put us up? Where are the others all staying? At the hotel? Not here? You are wonderful. Oh, of course, if you say there's room, it would be heaps of fun. But I do think, Victoria, that you might have told me that you had invited a house-party."

"But we did n't," Victoria whispered. "I'll explain it all later. Oh, Mr. Pott, you don't know my mother."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Pott. Do, like a dear

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man, help me off with some of these things. Oh, Prince, it was splendid! And who is this young man, Victoria? Mr. Saunders, the painter? Glad to meet you, Mr. Saunders. Of course, I know your portraits well. No? Not portraits? Oh, of course, landscapes. Thank you, Mr. Pott. Now I have nearly emerged — Oh, thank you, Mr. Saunders. Dacre! not a real true cocktail! — for me! To take me back to little old New York! That's the kind of son-in-law to have. Here's to our happy party! Oh, Victoria, what a goddess! Who is it?"

"It's Maria coming to announce dinner, I think. Prince, will you take Aunt Clara? Uncle James, will you take my mother? Jimmie, you and Mr. Pott shall share Sallie. Oh! I've left Dacre out. Never mind: I am a new hostess. Dacre shall take me. Don't hurry, Dacre," she whispered. "Now this is awful! What is to be done? Where shall we put them?"

"I can't do the sum now," Dacre answered hurriedly. "We will manage to meet after dinner, and fix it up somehow. Remember, the Prince is on your right, and you must nod to Mr. Pott to say grace."

CHAPTER XI

"My dear lady," the Reverend Pott spoke impressively, "as the Bishop of Gossex said to me only a month ago, 'Women do not want the vote.' In this I am sure the Prince will agree. Do you not, your excellency?"

The Prince raised an expressive shoulder. "Pardon, sir, I know nuzzing of ze question."

"Ah, but surely, sir, that does not prevent your having an opinion," Aunt Clara cried sarcastically. "As a rule, the less a man knows of the question, the more positive he is."

"Clara!" Uncle James admonished.

"The point," Aunt Clara continued, "which I should like to show to the bishop is not whether women want the vote, but that it is their duty to want it."

"Oh, don't put it that way," Mrs. Wade declared flippantly, "or no one will take any interest in it."

The Reverend Pott cleared his throat, as one who plainly says, "Dear madam, pray remember

my cloth"; and Mrs. Wade replied instantly, leaning across the table with a smile which even her enemies found irresistible, "Dear Vicar, I will try to remember, but you are on your holiday, so wouldn't it be more amusing if we all really tried to forget? More amusing for you, I mean?"

"Mamma!" reproved Victoria.

"It's quite all right, darling. Mr. Pott understands. Do go on, dear Mrs. Gosseley. Tell us more about your interesting friend, Miss Hall."

"McAll," corrected Aunt Clara severely.

"I always like to know how people look. Is she pretty?" The question was naïve. Mrs. Wade was supremely pretty herself.

The squire chuckled. Aunt Clara looked annoyed.

"She has more than mere beauty," she answered.

"Really? — Oh, style!" Mrs. Wade was enraptured. "Do you know, to me style counts for more than beauty —!"

"Style!" Aunt Clara repeated indignantly. "She has no style—"

"Then it's clothes!"

"She has no clothes," Aunt Clara insisted. "She's in the vanguard of the movement."

"No clothes!" cried the Prince. "Is it so? In ze paper I have seen zat ze ladies have ze clothes torn from ze backs, but is eet true?—no clothes? Absolument nue?"

"Oh, dear Prince, no!" Mrs. Wade cried, laughing. "No pretty clothes, Mrs. Gosseley means — no clothes like mine."

"Zat I can well believe, madame. For in all, Madame Wade is incom-par-able."

Mrs. Wade smiled over a rose held to her lips.

"You really think so?" she said under her breath.

"Mamma, would you mind passing those chocolates along? Sallie, what are you and the painter discussing so earnestly?"

Sallie turned, her grey eyes grave.

"Women's rights, too," Jimmie answered for her.

"Really!" Victoria said, bending toward them in surprise. "You're not!"

"Yes—we both are," Sallie said, smiling.

Jimmie leaned over to Victoria. "We dare n't own it," he said in a stage-whisper. Then, as he sat back — "You see, the vicar has already implied during dinner that I'm an anarchist and an atheist — were there any more beginning with A, Miss Radford? — and so it takes more than mortal courage to confess my interest in the suffrage."

Aunt Clara caught the words and beamed suddenly upon him. It was support from a most unexpected quarter.

Dacre laughed. "Old Jimmie, you were always on the weaker side," he said.

"Weaker, indeed!" Aunt Clara exclaimed.

"Weaker," repeated Uncle James firmly.

"Weaker?" questioned Mrs. Wade. "Now, dear squire, you are much too gallant to believe that."

"Weakness is often strength, dear madam," the squire returned with a bow. "And the trouble with these confounded suffragettes—excuse me, Clara!—is that they forget the fact!"

"Ah, I can see you think our old pastime of breaking hearts more womanly than the new one of breaking windows, squire." Mrs. Wade was arch. "Certainly, and much more becoming."

"Oh, but we've grown beyond that," Sallie said quickly, turning with an earnest face to Mrs. Gosseley. "That is, many of us have. We don't want to break hearts. We have found a new conscience. We don't want the vote; we want the power to help and redress which the vote will give us. At least," she said, with a little bow full of charming deference, "that's how I understand it."

The flippancy faded from Mrs. Wade's face, and she was gazing earnestly at the bit of bread crumbling beneath her fingers. She ended the silence that followed Sallie's words by speaking with an effort.

"We women all feel as you do, Sallie, when we are not eaten up by selfishness and let ourselves think."

The Prince turned, astonished at the note in her voice, and she met his gaze with petulantly lifted eyebrows and a little shrug.

"The doll," she said to him rapidly in French,
"is stuffed with nonsense, but there is a little
hidden spring, you know, which will answer when
the right string is pulled."

"I am so much the richer by the knowledge," he said as rapidly, with a bow.

The Reverend Pott cleared his throat. "No one can regard the dignity of womanhood with greater respect than myself," he began.

"Hear, hear!" from Jimmie, catching a wink from Dacre.

"I say, sir, that no one can regard the dignity of womanhood with greater respect than myself, but when they forget what is becoming to their sex and rush about with hammers, wilfully destroying property, I, for one, must wash my hands of them."

"What I object to," Jimmie cried, "is not the smashing, but the dull things they smash! The emancipated women of England have lost a gigantic opportunity. They might have become public benefactors, and won the thanks of posterity."

"I own I do not follow you, sir," Mr. Pott broke in coldly.

"What they have evidently lacked is an artistic adviser like myself," Jimmie continued, ignoring the interruption, and waxing eloquent. "Smashing-parties personally conducted! What

a glorious raid it would be! We should start

'Where the Duke of York so high Like a Nelson in the sky, And the blackened warriors glare Round the asphalt of the Square.'"

"Hear, hear!" cried Dacre in his turn.

"By Jove, what a harvest it would be, eh?" He darted brilliant glances around the table. "How we should lay Boehm in the dust! There'd be a chance for English sculpture then! We should swarm up the Albert Memorial, and then I'd head'em for the dear old Tate.

'What a joy to hear the crash, When we wandered there to smash!'"

He paused, leaning forward keenly. "Think of a London freed from her mistakes! Her artistic failures in the dust!"

"Well, well, I don't know about art," the squire began, "but Pott and I seem to be in the minority. The ladies all against us; all, that is, except my little Victoria."

"Oh, I," said Victoria, laughing, "am only nineteen, and know nothing, uncle dear, and don't count — except to Dacre. But I tell you, uncle, Dacre has leanings — leanings!"

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"Traitor!" Dacre cried. "Do you want my uncle to disinherit me? No, aunt, do not bend that look of triumph upon uncle. I am opposed to your friend, Miss McAll, her party and their tactics. They are odious. But I believe in a much wider future for women, and I certainly expect that they will gain the vote in England when they are ready for it. Then we shall see what that awakened conscience of which Miss Radford spoke, and which I believe does exist, will do to solve some of the great problems of our existence."

"The trouble," Sallie said quietly, "is that we shall not be here to see. It will take more than one generation. Mothers with this awakened conscience will bear not only daughters but sons to carry on the work."

The Reverend Pott cast down his eyes. Although he unblushingly read the Bible weekly from his pulpit to a mixed congregation of all ages, he was offended at such plain speech from the lips of a young lady.

Jimmie raised his hand. "Please, ma'am, please, Mrs. Dacre, I've made a Limerick. May I say it?—

There was once a -

No, I've got stage fright. I can't go on under Mr. Pott's disapproving eye. It was really quite all right, Vicar!"

"Don't listen to him, Mr. Pott," Victoria said, rising. "Let us all come out and forget our differences in coffee on the terrace."

CHAPTER XII

"Was there ever such a night!" Mrs. Wade exclaimed, as the ladies stepped out on to the terrace. "Ever such air!—such moonlight!—such scent!"

The party stood still, drinking in the beauty. The moon high above the sea shimmered on the water, touched the face of the cliffs at the headland, silvered the olive trees, and bathed the white walls of the villa in light. A tall cypress at the end of the terrace stood like a sentinel, black against the iridescent sky. The soft air came up from the garden, heavy with the breath of roses and lilies of the Annunciation.

Mrs. Wade gave an impatient sigh. "It is too beautiful! — too beautiful!" she cried, striking the palm of her hand sharply with her closed fan. "Victoria, you should n't allow it! It's for poets — and children — and lovers — and artists."

She turned and walked along the terrace, stirred by a sudden trembling as she heard a footstep following her. If it were Boris, on such a night, in such a spot, could she retain her mask of shallow indifference? She had nearly dropped it at dinner.

She nervously paused, her fingers playing with her fan, the colour rising, then dying in her cheek. He was just behind her.

"What a sensitive spirit is yours, dear lady."

Mrs. Wade started, and bit her lip with sudden mortification. It was the tiresome parsonman, Pott. The Prince, as she saw in one rapid glance, was talking to Sallie at the other end of the terrace.

"Sensitive, I judge, to all sweet influences," the parsonical voice continued.

Mrs. Wade laughed shortly. "Such as—?" she queried, almost insolently.

The vicar waved a vague, white hand. "The sea, the stars, the flowers, the night, Nature!"

Mrs. Wade's satin slipper tapped the tiles impatiently. "To be quite truthful," she declared, "I hate Nature with a big N. I love people—people—people. Not only big, important people, but all kinds—odd people, poor people, little people." She gazed at him.

"But, surely," he persisted, "I heard your words. Too beautiful—too beautiful, you said."

"Yes, and I added, 'It's for poets—and children—and lovers—and artists.' We are none of these." She looked out to sea indifferently. What did Boris see in Sallie? It was too silly. Well, she would not let him see that she even noticed. She turned to her companion with sudden warmth. "Are we?" she amended softly, with an arch glance.

Mr. Pott, dangling his glasses on his fore-finger, retreated a step, then took a step nearer. He would be on his guard. He had always heard of the bold American ways. Yet her tone was distinctly flattering. He did not think that she had ever treated the Prince as kindly. He cleared his throat. "Are we?" he repeated, awkwardly.

"Are we?" she repeated again, "or rather, dear Mr. Pott, are you —a poet? Ah! I believe that you are — you do write poetry — confess it!"

"Not so fast, dear lady, not so fast," the vicar said, remembering that the Vicar of Blandford had married a rich American wife. "I have, I must own, composed rhymes upon occasion — quite little, trifling things."

"How charming! Then you must have been a lover, too! Ah, Mr. Pott, even you have not escaped. Was it long ago? And what was she like?" She bent towards him audaciously. The Prince was looking at her.

"Like — like," the vicar said, in a stifled voice - "like" - he tried vainly to remember what "she" had been like - "like you," he ended recklessly.

"Oh, Vicar!" Mrs. Wade threw back her head. "I would not have believed it of you. It is the Capri air, you know. They say that it has the oddest effect on one. That is why I am going away soon. I am frankly afraid-and now that you are warned, dear Vicar-"

"I should be forearmed - indeed, I should. Yet, against loveliness — beauty — youth — "

"You can leave out the youth."

"A man — has little power —"

"Dear, dear," she said absently. "Have n't they really?" Sallie and Jimmie had gone into the garden. The Prince was fidgeting at the other end of the terrace.

"—little chance." The vicar was reckless.

"As my friend, the incumbent of St. Asalph's at Blandford, said to me — he, himself, married an American —"

"How reckless!" — she drew a sigh of relief: the Prince was really coming to seek her.

"Not at all," the vicar went on. "Of course, we thought that it might militate against him in his career. But, as it happens, even the bishop likes her very much."

"No?" Mrs. Wade's tone had recovered its vivacity. "Do you mean that she has n't really disgraced her husband yet, Vicar? She does n't paint, like Lady Wright, or wear a wig, like the Duchess of Gossex, or dance barefooted before the King, like Lady Blank? You surprise me!"

The vicar was staring, a trifle uncomfortable. "Oh, no, she's very nice—really!"

"Of course, she is," Mrs. Wade said, laughing softly. She knew now that the Prince was just behind her.

"Will you play bridge, Mrs. Wade?" he said, over her shoulder.

"You surely will not leave this beautiful night,

this soft air, the stars, dear lady, to play cards within the heated atmosphere of the drawing-room."

Mrs. Wade was determined to punish the Prince. She ignored him as she replied, on a confidential note: "Ah, dear Vicar, have you already forgotten what I said about — you remember?"

The vicar, to whom the game of allusion was unknown, looked pleased but remained mystified, while Mrs. Wade, leaning upon the balustrade, waved to Sallie below in the garden. "You can't think how nice you look down there," she called.

"Not half as nice as you look up there," Sallie answered.

Mrs. Wade laughed again, and stood up with a sigh. "Dear delightful youth," she said. "Those two seem to be getting on uncommonly well. Don't you think so, Vicar?" Without waiting for his answer, she went forward to meet Victoria, leaving the Prince and the vicar gazing somewhat foolishly at each other.

"The Prince says he would like a game of bridge with you, mamma, did he tell you? Aunt Clara says that she'll play." "I'm a very poor player, Victoria, but I always enjoy a game thoroughly," Aunt Clara said, coming out.

Mrs. Wade sighed slightly.

"Your Uncle James will be glad, I am sure, to make a fourth to complete the table," Aunt Clara added.

Mrs. Wade turned. "Come, Mr. Pott, we are going to play bridge. Come and sit by me and tell me when I make mistakes."

Mr. Pott hastened forward with a gratified smile. "I fear that you have a poor tutor, but a devoted one," he said, with a bow.

"How pretty! How nice of you!" They all entered the drawing-room together. Mrs. Wade laid her hand on the cards. "Shall we cut?" she said.

CHAPTER XIII

"They are settled," Victoria said softly, her hand on Dacre's arm, as she drew him to the balustrade. "Oh, did you ever know such a dinner? I couldn't keep my mind on anything, I was trying so hard to arrange about beds. Whenever I did come to, I found Jimmie and the vicar at loggerheads. Your aunt was furious at mother about Miss McAll."

Dacre drew his handkerchief across his forehead. "Awful!" he said. "Those are the only two who seem to be enjoying it!" He pointed down the garden, where Sallie's white dress gleamed amid the trees.

"Yes," Victoria answered absently. "The only possible way that I can see, is to put the Prince in Sallie's room."

"My dear, what do you mean?"

"That we must throw ourselves on Sallie's mercy and explain, more or less, how we are placed, and ask her to share mother's room."

"But where is your mother's room?"

"My dear, my head's in a perfect whirl! Mother has now got our room, and Sallie is sharing our room with mother."

"Then, where is our room?"

"We are on the roof."

"The roof! That's all very well, but there's no bed on the roof."

"Now, don't be tiresome, Dacre. We must first tell Sallie, in strict confidence, that she has got our room and she's not to tell mother. Of course, we mustn't tell her that we are sleeping on the roof. We must keep that a secret from every one. Now, don't forget, Dacre. I worked it all out at dinner. No, you must not interrupt me, or else I shall forget it. Now, you see, it's quite simple."

"Quite," Dacre repeated sarcastically. "As I understood it, Jimmie has the garden room, Pott has Maria's room, Maria shares her mother's room, the Prince has our—no—the Prince has Sallie's room, Sallie and your mother have ours, uncle and aunt have what we once, in our innocence, called the 'spare room,' and we—oh, Lord!—lie upon the roof!"

"Yes," repeated Victoria, "you see, it's quite

simple. Now, all we have to do is this—go and explain to Jimmie and Sallie, all except about the roof. Then we must get them into the drawing-room and try and make things hum. If bridge does n't work, we'll try coon-can. Then, when things are going, I can slip away to help Maria change the rooms, but before I go I shall remark casually to Aunt Clara that I think it's rather chilly, and close the window and draw the curtains."

"Why do that?" said Dacre.

"So they won't see me carrying the rugs and pillows along the terrace on my way to the roof, silly!"

"Quite so," said Dacre. "Now, you propose as our first move that we should go down and interrupt that tête-à-tête. We shan't be popular."

"Never mind. Come on. We had most of our tête-à-têtes interrupted. There's a dear."

She slipped her arm through his, and together they went down the steps, and through the pergola, where, beneath the roses, Sallie and the painter were walking slowly up and down.

"Look, Dacre," said Victoria. "Should you

have thought that Sallie was the sort of person to — Sallie is n't a flirt."

"Everybody," said Dacre, "is the sort of person to, if the other person is the right person."

"What is that?" Sallie said, turning. "It sounds complicated."

"It is n't," said Dacre. "It's simple. But we haven't time for that now. Victoria has a piece of —"

"News to tell you," finished Victoria. "But, first, you must both promise not to tell."

"We swear," said Jimmie dramatically.

"I'd rather not swear till I know more about it," said Sallie.

"Well, we can trust her anyway, Victoria," Dacre said. "It's about the spare room!"

"You poor dears!" said Sallie. "Mr. Saunders and I have been talking about it. Where are you going to put us all up?"

"Oh, it's quite simple, really," said Victoria. "Fortunately, there are such lots of rooms in the house, but some of them are rather rough. I am afraid that you find the garden room rather primitive, Mr. Saunders."

Jimmie began to protest, but Victoria cut him

short. "This is what I want to ask. May I put the Prince in your room, Sallie, and put you into the adjoining room with my mother?"

"But that's your room."

"Yes, but that doesn't matter. Dacre and I have quite comfortable quarters. The only thing is that mother mustn't know that we're moving. You must both promise not to tell any one that we are turned out. Swear!"

"I swear," cried Sallie, laughing. "But it's rather rough on you."

"Not a bit," said Dacre. "Now that's settled, let's come back and try to keep things going, while Victoria gets Maria to arrange the rooms. By the way, Jimmie, what do you think of the goddess?" he asked, as the two girls strolled up the path.

"Which?" asked Jimmie, lighting a cigarette; oh, you mean the peasant girl you wrote about."

"Where are your eyes, man. She served us at dinner to-night. You must have noticed her."

"Did n't," said Jimmie laconically.

"Oh, Mr. Saunders, do tell us your Limerick now," Victoria said, turning.

"Too late, Mrs. Dacre. I had a sudden uncon-

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trollable desire to be very rude to the Reverend Pott. So many words rhyme with Pott, that it was quite easy. Then I remembered that you were my hostess, and heroically buried the gem. Don't tempt me."

"Come on, you conspirators," said Dacre.
"There is a lot yet to do before we are all safely tucked into our little beds."

"Into our little beds," Victoria repeated; "O Dacre!"

CHAPTER XIV

"Ssh!" said Uncle James, raising a warning hand, as the four young people entered the drawing-room window. "One spade."

"Auction?" said Dacre.

"Tréfle," said the Prince.

"What are tréfles?" queried Aunt Clara.

"Pardon, you say clubs," amended the Prince.

"Two hearts," said Aunt Clara firmly, placing a little pile of three upon the table.

"Double," Mrs. Wade said.

"I pass," said Uncle James.

"No," said the Prince.

"Oh, James, why did you pass?"

"Well, my dear, if you insist on discussing the cards, we had better lay down our hands at once."

"My dear, I am not discussing the cards. But I do not think that you should leave me in a double — I am sure that you have always told me not to leave you in a double. But that's so like men."

"It's my lead," said Mrs. Wade.

"Oh, dear," cried Aunt Clara. "I have only ten cards. Misdeal!"

"I am sure, my dear," Uncle James insisted, in an annoyed voice, "that I did not misdeal. The cards are probably on the floor. If you will insist on balancing them in little heaps on all portions of your person, you can expect nothing more. Dacre, just look under your aunt's chair."

"Let me," said the Reverend Pott.

While he and Dacre grovelled, Mrs. Wade lifted her brown eyes, dancing with fun, to her daughter. "Coon-can," she murmured.

"They are n't there," Dacre said, coming up rather dishevelled.

"I do not see them, dear Mrs. Gosseley," Mr. Pott announced, rising from the other side.

"What are these?" asked Mrs. Wade, lifting the three from the table.

"Oh, of course," Aunt Clara exclaimed. "I always put my trumps on the table to remember. Shall we go on?"

"Oh, I am sorry," Mrs. Wade cried. "When you said, 'Misdeal,' I chucked my hand down."

"I also," said the Prince.

"Then, do stop bridge, unless you are very anxious to finish the game, and let us all play coon-can," Victoria broke in. "Aunt Clara, you'll like it, because you are supposed to lay your hand on the table. Shall we, Dacre?"

"Yes, do let's," Sallie cried. "Mr. Saunders loves it."

"Very well," Aunt Clara said reluctantly. "If you wish it. But I should have liked to have played that hand. Is there any skill in coon-can? Such a vulgar name, my dear Victoria."

"It's deeply scientific," Jimmie said, drawing his chair to Mrs. Gosseley's side. "Allow me to initiate you into the mysteries. We have twelve cards all round, or is it ten? Then, we all draw from each other and try to make pairs and sequences and things, and when we have made them, we throw them down on the table. It's quite easy."

"Quite simple," said the vicar. "I have played it several times already in Wimford. It's a very fashionable game, Mrs. Gosseley."

Mrs. Burrough-Gosseley merely sniffed and became as rigid as the remembrance of Gosseley Hall could make her, and the game began.

"But I never get any pairs or sequences, Mr. Saunders," she announced at length. "It is not simple at all. You always pick up from that pile the very card that I need to complete my own hand. It is certainly odd. Every time. I should have been out long ago."

"Sorry," said Jimmie. "Out," and laid down his hand.

"How many, Aunt Clara?" Dacre asked.

"It comes to one hundred and six. But need I count the three aces? If Mr. Saunders had not picked up that last one, I should have had it and could have put them down. That would take off forty-four."

"One hundred and six," Dacre repeated inexorably. "Next, please."

"I don't like this game at all," Aunt Clara objected. "It is too much a matter of luck; no skill." But, as the game proceeded and her hand matched up, her opinion changed, and when, amid great applause, she "ratted" first, she pronounced a more matured judgment. "Yes, I see the game requires skill, after all. It takes a certain selective discrimination, - very interesting, indeed, - and it certainly conduces to a certain amount of hilarity. Though I cannot see why you are all laughing now. Mr. Saunders, why are you laughing?"

"Don't ask me, ma'am."

"It always has this effect," Mrs. Wade declared. "It's a sort of social life-preserver, warranted to save the most desperately dull situation. It never fails. It's sure to float. Look here, Prince. That's the second nine you've taken. Are n't you playing this time, Victoria?"

"Not this time. I have to go and give one or two orders. Aunt Clara, don't you find it rather chilly here? I think I must shut the window. The night air in Italy is not good, is it?"

She passed to the window, closed it and drew the curtains, then, with a nod to Dacre, left the room.

"To rat or not to rat, that is the question," Jimmie murmured. Under the edge of the table, the Prince passed a twisted paper to his fair neighbour. It bore but two words, "Je m'ennuie."

Mrs. Wade turned to him, and for a moment gave him the privilege of gazing into her eyes. "Moi aussi," she whispered. "My turn? I am sorry. No, it's the Prince's turn."

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"It is very hot here, Dacre," Aunt Clara exclaimed. "Victoria should not have closed that window. We are stifling."

"I'll open it," Jimmie said, jumping up.

"Do you think you'd better?" Dacre objected.

"Is n't it better to — er — stifle than — er — die of typhoid or malaria or something? Jimmie, you open that window at your own risk." Jimmie paused.

"Reesk, Monsieur Carden?" The Prince leaned forward. "Je vous assure, there is no reesk. The air of Capri, it would not harm a leetle fly."

"As you will," said Dacre gloomily. "I have done my best."

Jimmie threw open the window, and every one drew a breath of night air with relief.

"Delightful air," the vicar said. "Prince, you are quite right. Pure, delightful air, sir."

"The truth is," said Dacre desperately, "I don't think Victoria was thinking of the air. She did n't want to make you nervous. But, for the last few nights, a man has been skulking about the villa. He comes about eleven. It is n't pleasant to feel that he may be looking in at us—

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though I dare say he is only one of Maria's admirers. I fancy that's why Victoria closed the window." He drew out his watch. "It is five minutes past eleven now."

The vicar shivered. "It is a little chilly," he said.

"You have not told the police? I will go for you in the morning," the Prince cried excitedly. "It's very dangerous. So many desperate men in Naples. Assuredly, you must tell the police."

The vicar cleared his throat. "Would it not be as wise to close the window, as a mere precaution?" he asked. "Not for myself, I have nothing to lose. But the ladies have jewels."

"My diamond necklace." Aunt Clara covered it with her hand. "It has never been menaced before. James gave it to me when we were married. It was his mother's, and I shall leave it to dear Victoria."

"And my pearls," Mrs. Wade said, lifting the string. "Best imitation from the Rue de Rivoli. They are good, are n't they?"

"Shall I shut the window?" the vicar asked.

"It would give the fellow an opportunity of

approaching much closer," Uncle James said, shaking his head.

"And, besides, it is fearfully hot," said Sallie. Dacre rose. "I tell you. You people go on with your game, and I will keep guard on the terrace outside and smoke a cigarette. I hope I haven't alarmed you. I don't think he is a desperate character, you know."

"Ah, you cannot tell!" the Prince cried. "I have been in just so calm a room as this, when, Pouf! a bomb and all is broken — chairs and table, the cartes scattered — the game ended for all but me. It is duty, monsieur, to report to the police in the morning."

"Meanwhile," Dacre said, "I assure you ladies that, with me on the terrace, you are safe." He stepped out, not a moment too soon. For at the same second Victoria emerged from the long window of their bedroom, her arms laden with rugs and garments, starting on her first journey to the roof. Dacre wildly motioned her back, and followed her into the dismantled room.

"Go back! Go back! You can't go along the terrace now," he whispered. "Aunt Clara has had the window opened. They were stifling. I

did my best to get it shut — blundered into a lie, and now we'll have to stick to it."

"Not more, Dacre! What did you say?"

"That a desperado lurks around the garden at night. Oh, yes, you may look. I know I was an idiot. But it's done now. Of course, they are all on edge and peering out, so you must go out by the kitchen and round the corner of the house and up. Get Maria to help you. Hurry — oh! they are calling me!"

"Dacre! Dacre!" It was Aunt Clara's voice, raised to a nervous scream. "Oh, Dacre has disappeared."

Dacre rushed out, but too late to prevent the whole party from emerging.

"It's all right. I'm here," he cried, waving them back. "I've seen nothing—I—I—I don't think there is any one about to-night. You people must all be tired," he continued, as he pushed them into the drawing-room. "Let's have our—er—nightcaps, and go to bed. I'll get the tray."

"But, surely that is not safe. Some one should keep watch on the terrace," the vicar said.

"No," Dacre answered quickly. "You see, if

he is not here at eleven, he does n't come — seems to be a methodical ruffian."

"Acting under orders," the Prince said darkly.

"Just wait here," Dacre went on, putting Aunt Clara into a chair, "and I'll get the drinks. What does everybody want — whiskey, Prince? — whiskey, uncle? — whiskey, Jimmie? — Aunt Clara?"

"A cup of hot Vi-tæ for me."

"Mrs. Wade? - Sallie?"

"Lemonade, Dacre, with ice for us both," Mrs. Wade declared, "and a dash of whiskey in mine."

"Good. I'll be back in a minute."

Aunt Clara sat up in her chair, looking around the circle of her fellow-guests.

"There is more in this," she said solemnly, than meets the eye."

CHAPTER XV

THE terrace lay whitely still under the moon. The lights were out in the drawing-room. Jimmie had retired to his garden house, the various guests had been shown to their rooms for the night, and now peace seemed to reign.

A shadow was projected on the white floor, followed by a second shadow, creeping from the darkened dining-room. Without a word, almost without a sound, the two figures made their way along the wall and gained the stairs that led to the roof.

"That's all right," said Dacre, with a sigh of relief. "Good Lord, what an evening! I thought we should never get them to bed. I have never known Aunt Clara to be so trying!"

"And mamma was pretty bad, at the end!"

"Well, quick now. We must n't talk. It's very late. We must go to sleep. It is very dark in the shadows here. Where did you put the things?"

"In the corner. Can't you see? Don't walk so heavily, Dacre. They'll hear you down below.

Now, just tuck this rug round me, there's a dear, and you roll up in the other, and there we are."

"Right-o," said Dacre. "Just one cigarette before I turn in. Are you comfy?"

Victoria sniffed. "I thought I was, but the tiles do come through in spots."

"Gad," said Dacre, "the peace of this after the fuss downstairs. I wish you could see the moonlight over the olive trees. It's magnificent!"

"Oh, leave the old moonlight alone and come to bed, Dacre."

"Bed? Well, I never heard this called by that name before," said Dacre, throwing away his cigarette. "Where's my rug now? Here we are. Ow, my poor child, it is hard."

"You'll get used to it," Victoria murmured drowsily. "Good-night, old dear."

"Good-night, sweetheart." Dacre yawned profoundly. "We are dead tired," he said. They were both quiet for a moment, then Dacre began to twist and turn.

"Dacre, for goodness' sake, stop your wriggling," Victoria exclaimed irritably. "I simply can't go to sleep."

"Sorry — these damned tiles —"

"What's that, Dacre?"

They both sat up and listened.

"It sounded like a door opening."

"Hush," said Dacre. "Listen. It's some one on the terrace. They're striking a match!"

"Thanks, after you," said a voice distinctly.

"It's that old fool, Pott," said Dacre. "What the dickens is he doing up, and who's he talking to?"

"Uncle James. Can't you hear?"

The squire's voice came up clearly. "Thank you, vicar, for coming out with me. My wife is very nervous and nothing would pacify her but my coming to have a look for that man. Though it seems to me quite needless. It's as bright as day in the moonlight. Now, where do these stairs lead?"

Victoria clutched Dacre.

"To the roof, I take it," said Mr. Pott.

"I think we had better go up and have a look around."

"If you think it necessary. After you, squire."

"James - James."

Aunt Clara's voice trailed plaintively out from her open window.

"I swear," burst out Dacre savagely, "it is a little too much, Victoria. Why don't they go to sleep!"

"James, James! do you know where Victoria's room is? My hot-water bottle has not been filled. I do think they might have seen to it."

"No, my dear, I do not, and I certainly should not call them at this time of night if I did."

"Pray, Mrs. Gosseley," the vicar's voice rose politely, "take mine. I have discovered one in my bed, and I never use them."

"Oh, thank you, vicar. The squire can bring it to me."

"Well, I wish he would, and have done with it," said Dacre, lying down.

Steps died away, and a door closed.

"Good-night again," said Dacre.

He was just dozing off, when Victoria spoke.

"Dacre, don't you hear a funny sound?"

"No, and I don't care if I do."

"But, really, you must listen. Do, please. It is coming from the garden. I am sure there is somebody there. Dacre dear, please wake up. You must go and see what it is."

Dacre raised himself on his elbow with a groan.

"There, don't you hear, a funny bumping noise?"

Dacre blinked at the moonlight. "Yes," he said crossly, "I hear. It is coming from the garden house, and it sounds like that idiot Jimmie."

"Do, Dacre, look over the parapet and see."
Dacre resignedly arose, and make his way to
the edge of the roof.

"What are you laughing at?" Victoria asked.

"Jimmie and the mosquitoes. Gad, I'm glad some one else is uncomfortable. He's lit his lamp. I wish you could see him hopping about. Fortunately, we can't hear his language. He's got a huge bolster, and he's swiping for all he's worth. That's my game. Listen, Victoria! Go it, old man. Gad, he's funny!"

"All right, Dacre. That's enough. Come back. He's stopped now. Do you think we shall ever get to sleep? What time do you think it is?"

"Oh, about breakfast-time, I should say. Now —what's that?"

"Don't disturb yourself, Sallie." It was Mrs. Wade's voice. "I can't sleep, so I am just going outside on the terrace for a breath of air. No, I

am quite all right. I have my cloak and a scarf, if I need it. Good-night, dear."

"Oh, blow them. Who's that?" whispered Dacre.

"It's mamma," Victoria answered. "She's walking up and down."

"A nice time for exercise. Talk about tact! Oh, Lord, she's begun to hum."

"I like to hear her hum. Mamma's got a nice voice, and I think you're very unkind, Dacre."

"I don't mean to be," he said patiently, "but my nerves are getting a little unstrung. What a wonderful woman your mother is, Victoria!"

"Now you are being sarcastic, and that's worse."

"Don't let's quarrel, Victoria. We can't afford to at this crisis. What's that? I suppose some one else has come out to do Sandow exercises. Listen, Victoria. Good Lord, it's the Prince!"

"It can't be," said Victoria. "Hush!"

"Prince!" Mrs. Wade's voice came softly. "What are you doing here?"

"I do not know yet what I am doing. I, too, could not sleep. I did not go to bed. I did pace my room. When I saw you wandering like a white

moonbeam on the terrace, I, too, came out. Mon Dieu, madame," he lapsed into fluent French. "Shall I never have a chance of seeing you alone without the Pott and the Goslings, and all these wretched English? When you consented but yesterday to fly with me, I hoped to find your little girl and her lover alone in a garden, with you and me. And, behold, I find this!"

"Good gracious, my dear man, not here, where we shall be overheard by the whole house!"

"Then, come with me for a moment only, into the garden — no — up those stairs. It is safe."

"To the roof!" Mrs. Wade said, laughing softly. "Oh, Prince, Prince — it is rather shocking, but what fun!"

CHAPTER XVI

"THEY'RE coming!" Victoria whispered. "How perfectly awful. What's to be done, Dacre?"

"Only keep still and in the shadows."

"But -- "

"Shut up!" said Dacre savagely.

Victoria subsided. Steps and the swish of drapery sounded nearer up the stairs.

"This is mad." It was Mrs. Wade's voice, as she trailed a slim, white figure across the roof. "Mad—mad—mad!" She flung the words lightly. "Suppose some one comes! What will they think?"

The Prince, a tall, striking figure in evening clothes, followed her.

"Think?" he repeated. "Probably the worst. It is so much more amusing to think the worst, chère madame."

"Yes, is n't it." Mrs. Wade still spoke over her shoulder, half laughing. "Precisely, what would you think, if—"

The Prince bowed to her back. "I would not think precisely, if —"

Mrs. Wade had reached the parapet, where she sat down. "You never fail to say the right thing," she began lightly.

"Thank you," the Prince said, "but I have not come to talk that kind of silly nonsense."

"Ah, but what is life without finesse?" she protested flippantly.

"Finesse," he repeated, "is for society, for the crowd; but now — Elise — for us there must be something more sincere — Elise — look at me."

"Elise," Mrs. Wade repeated reprovingly, her head turned away. "You must n't be silly—yet. Oh, what a night. It is a big excuse for anything, is n't it—such a night—One is old enough to know better, yet—"

"One can know no better than this night can teach us," the Prince cried passionately, as he seized her hand. "You shall not play with me any longer, madame. Listen, my adored one"; and, to the horror of the onlookers, he went down on his knees by her side. "When I met you last year in Cairo, you encouraged me, you let me believe

that you almost cared for me; then you told me that, until your daughter married, you would not marry again. You said that I must go away—I went. You sent me not a word, not a line."

"I could n't."

"I knew nothing that was happening to you. I was unhappy — but unhappy! Then suddenly I saw the notice of the grand wedding. I was seized with madness. 'Boris,' I said to myself, 'go to her quickly — tell her you love her — bring her back with you.'"

"You go fast—"

"I rushed to Cannes — but rushed! How did you receive me? Vraiment, c'était quelque chose d'inouï." His voice trembled.

Mrs. Wade laughed softly.

"No, you shall not laugh! How did you receive me? You remember where? At the Casino—at tea."

"There was a crowd," she explained.

"But I ask you, was it the way to treat me—who adore you—and after this so long year?"

Mrs. Wade shrugged slightly. "I could not throw myself into your arms before them all—could I?" she said.

"I did not ask you to. I only asked you to receive me like a friend."

"Really!" Mrs. Wade was vivacious. "Is that all you want? You think, then, that I meet all my friends on the roof of a strange house at two in the morning!"

"No — no," he protested.

"Then you think it's this famous air, perhaps —"

"No, no," his voice was masterful. He rose to his feet and stood before her. "I think it is me—me. You have done this for me—for me only. For me, because I love you—I love you."

She pushed him away. "Oh, don't, don't spoil it yet," she said breathlessly. "Don't say what every one else would say."

"Do they?" he cried, in a furious voice. "Do they, indeed! How dare they! Who does? Center Hodgson?—the little d'Aulby?—the Baron? They all say this—then, why may not I?"

"They don't," Mrs. Wade protested, rising.
"But they'd like to—"

There was a moment's silence; then the Prince stepped back and bowed. "I am sorry," he said. "I have misunderstood." "What?" The word was low. "What have you understood?"

"That you cared — I thought that you cared for me a little. That you but waited for her to marry to — enfin —"

"Enfin," she repeated softly. Then, looking up, she went on quickly. "Victoria was married over a month ago in London. Did you rush to my side? Did you? Why, you got to Cannes only a week ago! I had been there nearly three weeks—not that I cared—not that I expected—"Her voice trembled.

With a cry, he caught her by the wrists. "You did care," he said, between his teeth. "You did care, and you expected me, and I did not come. Why? Because I was down on my lands in the country, and I did not see the paper till ten days ago."

She gave a little cry. "Oh!"

"It was not until yesterday," he rushed on, "that you would speak to me—and then only because of my monoplane—because you wanted a new sensation. But I was thankful to have you for an hour, at any price. So we came."

"We came," she echoed, "and we are here -



REALLY! IS THAT ALL YOU WANT?



and alone — and it is a marvellous night — and it will never come again — and — "

"What do you mean?" he asked, in a thick voice. "Elise, you mean—"

She raised her head, a faint smile on her lips, her face very white, and her brown eyes, sober for once, told him all. He caught her in his arms and crushed her to him, kissing her eyes, her upturned face, her lips, her hair.

In a moment, she pushed him away, and holding him by the lapels of his coat, looked up at him.

"You great, big, dear, delightful baby of a man. You could n't see what was as plain as day all this week, that I was loving you to distraction. I knew you never would see as long as we stayed in that crowd. I simply could n't let you see. So I just jumped at the aeroplane. Was n't it horrid of me? And I am sure that no two people ever had such a flight! I was simply worshipping your back all the way. Oh, Boris, Boris, is n't it glorious? I have been so miserable, punishing you and myself! You are splendid, you know. So big and strong, and with such an air, mon prince! Yes, kiss me—oh!

what was that?" She clung to his arm. "Didn't you hear something! A funny, gurgling sound? I must go back."

"Not yet," he begged. "It was nothing. I have waited so long. Give me back your hands. When will you marry me? In Rome — Elise — at once — n'est ce pas? I cannot wait. I won't wait. No! I am master now, and I tell thee."

"I love you to be the master, Boris. It was simply glorious flying with you. You are so horribly cool. I love taking frightful risks. It makes me feel all cold and all hot, and goes to my head."

"Like this —" he cried exultantly, seizing her in his arms. "You mad little woman!"

"Oh, I heard it again! There is something here. I know there is something here. I shall be caught! How awful — Boris, you must look. Suppose that man had hidden up here in the shadow — Ah, there! There is! I heard a snort, a choking — Oh! Oh! "A piercing scream rent the night air.

The Prince, with one hand, swept his adored into safety behind him, and sprang to meet the ambushed foe in the shadow. But before he could deal a single blow, he tripped over a foot—and fell headlong into a pile of rugs, nearly knocking the wind out of Dacre. Victoria, seeing the mêlée, sprang to her feet.

"Mother, mother," she cried, "do be quiet! You will awaken the whole house. Prince, levez-vous. It is only Dacre and me. We are sleeping up here, you see. Mother, do stop! It's really all right. We had our fingers in our ears most of the time. It was much worse for us than it was for you."

"Yes, Prince," Dacre was saying hastily, "you and Mrs. Wade must excuse us. We were in an awful position, you see. But we are delighted to be the first to congratulate you. Good Heavens, what's all the noise downstairs?"

"Only that mother has waked every one. Oh, Dacre, what shall we say? What shall we do?"

CHAPTER XVII

It was but too true. Mrs. Wade's wild shriek had hardly ceased to ring, ere it was echoed in varied tones from below.

"That's Maria," Victoria cried nervously; "and, oh! Zita is awake, too. She is furious. Listen!"

"That's Aunt Clara's voice now," Dacre declared, peering over the parapet.

"Calling to Sallie Radford," Mrs. Wade almost whimpered. "Oh, this is dreadful. They are all coming out. Who's that ringing the dinner-bell?"

"Aunt Clara," Dacre answered, from his post of vantage. "And Jimmie has heard it. He has just struck a light in his room."

The pandemonium below increased. There were doors slammed wildly, and above the noise came the sharply plaintive notes of the Reverend Pott, exclaiming in staccato accents:—

"My dear lady, what was that blood-curdling scream? I am terribly alarmed!"

Aunt Clara's exasperated voice rolled up: "Vicar — do something. Don't stand there doing nothing. Some one has been murdered in their beds."

"Calm yourself, Clara," Uncle James said sternly, "and stop ringing that bell. I will shout for Dacre—wherever the boy is—Ah, Mr. Saunders, so you heard that, too."

"What?" said Jimmie. "I heard the bell."

"We have been alarmed, sir," the Reverend Pott's voice was vibrant with emotion, "by a most blood-curdling scream."

Another door opened. "Whatever has happened?" Sallie asked, looking out.

Jimmie took a step towards her. "It's all right, Miss Radford. It was only an owl, I think."

"Owl, sir," said Mr. Pott. "It was the human voice in agony. The human voice, sir."

Jimmie scowled at him, then turned to Sallie. "Where's Dacre sleeping?" he asked quietly. "We must get him up at once."

"Don't know," Sallie said, looking anxious, as she leaned towards him. "Don't say anything, but Mrs. Wade is n't in my room, and I am very anxious about her."

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"Good Lord!" said Jimmie.

"We must shout for Dacre," the squire insisted. "Dacre! Dacre!"

On the roof, the four stood speechless, till the squire's shout nerved them to action.

"We must get out of this," Dacre announced shortly. "Follow me."

With a leap, he dashed down the steps, followed by the others, almost colliding with Mr. Pott at the foot, who struck at him feebly with his umbrella. "Out of the way," Dacre roared. "He climbed over the terrace — There!"

He rushed to the balustrade, followed by the other three, and there stopped short, throwing up his hands. "Too late!" he cried, as he turned to face his audience.

"Who?" cried Uncle James.

"What?" cried Aunt Clara.

"Where?" breathed the Reverend Pott, looking anxiously behind him.

Dacre drew his handkerchief across his damp forehead. "The villain—the desperado!" he hissed.

"I heard a scream," said Mr. Pott. "Has any one been assassinated?"

"You must explain, Dacre," said Uncle James.
"Tell us what has happened. Your aunt has been much alarmed."

Dacre included Mrs. Wade, Victoria, and the Prince in one guilty glance, and plunged nervously.

"I was - er - coming out to - er - "

"See that everything was all right," amended Victoria.

"Yes, to see that all was fastened, when I heard a sound —"

"A sound?" said Aunt Clara.

"Yes — a sound," repeated Victoria. "Be quiet, Zita — stop wringing your hands — and I heard it, too."

"And so did the Prince and I," said Mrs. Wade hastily.

"And we all ran to—to where the sound was," said Dacre, waving them back—"and there we saw him—armed to the teeth."

"Hatpins in his hair, and razors behind his ears," Jimmie murmured.

"I beg your pardon," whispered Mr. Pott. "Did you say razors?"

Dacre cast a furious glance at the interrupter.

"He was skulking near the foot of the steps. We did not want to alarm any one —the rest of you — so I made a dash at him and he bolted up to the roof — "

"And we ran after him," Victoria cried.

"It was awful," Mrs. Wade declared fervently. "He was there in the dark, and we could n't see him."

"Yes; and then," Victoria rushed on, "while we thought we were sure of him, he must have doubled on us, and the first thing we knew he had bolted down the steps and we after him, and that was just as you came — and now he's escaped!"

"But the scream!" Mr. Pott insisted. "What was that horrible scream?"

"The scream?" Victoria repeated, blankly.

"The scream?" Dacre echoed.

"The scream — " said the Prince; " oh — oh — I did kick him!"

"Were you near enough to kick him?" Uncle James asked sternly.

"Oh, you see, Uncle James," Dacre said hurriedly, "it was by mistake. It was very dark in the shadow of the parapet and we were hunting

for him, and I think that the Prince must have — er — er — "

"Stepped on him," said Victoria quickly.

"But where is he now?" the Reverend Pott asked brokenly.

"He must be in the garden," Aunt Clara announced. "I, for one, shall not close my eyes again to-night, unless the garden is patrolled."

"Quite," said Uncle James. "Prince, will you? Dacre? Vicar? Saunders? We can muster five." The squire's head was up like an old warhorse scenting battle. "Now, Vicar, none of your talk against compulsory military training in England. A little would come in very handy, you see, to-night. As it is, I'll take command. Good-bye, ladies. Forward — March!"

As the five started for the terrace steps, the Prince laid a hand on Dacre's shoulder.

"Brave garçon!" he said, in a hearty voice.
"A thousand thanks."

CHAPTER XVIII

"Well," Victoria announced dejectedly half an hour later, as she entered the drawing-room where the ladies were assembled in fragmentary costumes around the fire, "I can't get Zita or Maria to go back to bed."

"It's just as well," Mrs. Wade said, yawning.
"The men will be in at dawn, and they'll need coffee. It's almost morning now."

"Yes, that's all right," Victoria answered, but you don't know Zita. Only Dacre can manage her, she's so obstinate."

"Oh, I can make coffee if she won't," Sallie said. "It is as easy as rolling off a log." She was sitting on the floor in a big fur coat, her hands clasped around her knees, and was the only one of the party who looked quite fresh. "Anyway, you've made them stop their moaning, and that is something."

"Yes—they were dreadful," Victoria agreed.
"Aunt Clara, are you sure that you are warm enough? Oh, do tell us where you got the bell!
I did n't know there was one in the villa."

"It is my own, Victoria. I always travel with a bell, since hearing the story which Miss McAll told me some years ago of the terrible experience of a friend of hers in Russia. I am sorry that I cannot remember it in its entirety, but the bell was the principal point. It is an easy precaution, and one which I always take, in spite of your Uncle James."

"Does n't Mr. Gosseley approve?" Sallie asked.

Aunt Clara cleared her throat. "Hitherto," she said, "there have been only false alarms, which I must acknowledge have tried James considerably. But to-night, its value has been proved indisputably. Yes, I am quite warm, thank you, Victoria. I wear only curative clothing and never feel a chill. If I do, I take one of my Brace-o tablets, together with a little breathing, and I am quite myself again."

Mrs. Wade threw back her head with a soft laugh.

"What is it?" Sallie asked.

"Mr. Pott," Mrs. Wade answered crisply,—
"Mr. Pott and the pistol. He wanted it, and
yet he didn't want it. He was afraid to be

stationed alone without it, and he was afraid to touch it. I think Mr. Saunders was rather malicious in his unselfishness. He knew the vicar was afraid of it."

Sallie laughed, looking out of the long French window. The moon had set, there was an early hush, and a pearly greyness over terrace and garden. The sounds of measured steps drew nearer along the terrace; the Prince crossed the bar of light and disappeared again.

"Poor dears!" Mrs. Wade said, with a little shiver of her shoulders under the heavy white cloak. "We have the best of it here."

"I don't know," Sallie said lazily, holding a slim, boyish hand to the blaze. "It's rather fascinating out there now. There is much more mystery now than in moonlight. I would love to go down through the pergola into the olive grove. It must be wonderful in this light."

"You shall go and call Mr. Saunders when it is time for coffee," Mrs. Wade said indulgently. "He is down there, is n't he?"

"Don't know," Sallie answered, with careful indifference.

"Yes," Victoria said, "he is, and the vicar is

farther on in the grove. It was rather mean, I think, planting him over there by himself."

"Not at all, my dear Victoria," Aunt Clara answered severely. "Your Uncle James did quite right. Mr. Pott wished for the only firearm in the party, therefore he must naturally take an exposed post."

"But, do tell us, Victoria, about this man," Sallie exclaimed with sudden vivacity. "Where did you first see him?"

Mrs. Wade cast a keen glance at her daughter.

"Oh," Victoria answered promptly, "I've never seen him before to-night."

"Don't speak of it," Mrs. Wade cried, with a shudder. "My nerves really won't stand any more."

Aunt Clara sniffed. "You missed the worst of it," she said, shaking her head. "To be waked from peaceful sleep by a blood-curdling scream is a terrifying experience, I assure you,—a terrifying experience."

"Was it so loud?" Mrs. Wade asked, and went on without waiting for an answer. "Well, you must be tired out, Mrs. Gosseley. I know that I am, and frightfully sleepy, too! Oh-h!"

she yawned, and then cuddled down in her cloak, with closed eyes, her head resting against the back of the chair. "I advise you all to follow my example," she murmured drowsily.

Her words were almost instantly answered by a gentle snore from Aunt Clara, who sat upon a stiff chair, quite rigid, dressed in a grey flannel dressing-gown, her nodding head enveloped in a red scarf, her feet in knitted slippers of oldrose wool.

Sallie smiled, amused, at Victoria, who herself answered with a yawn. "I wish I could go to sleep as easily. The tiles were awfully hard—neither Dacre nor I could sleep."

"The tiles!" Sallie whispered.

Victoria looked ready to cry. "I can't explain," she said. "I am too tired. I'll tell you to-morrow. Oh, what a noise Aunt Clara does make."

A step sounded on the terrace; the Prince appeared again at the window.

"I thought I did hear something—ah! I see
—I hear—" He bowed, with a glance at Aunt
Clara, turned, and continued his beat.

"Throw me a cushion," Sallie said. "I am

ready to succumb, too. Thanks; you look comfy on that sofa — I shall be asleep in no time."

For an hour the room drowsed in the halflight, and only the regular rise and fall of Aunt Clara's loud, nasal trumpeting broke the brooding silence there.

CHAPTER XIX

"Mr. Saunders! Mr. Saunders, where are you? I am sent to call the pickets in. There's coffee for you in the house."

"This way, Miss Radford." Jimmie's voice came from the olive grove. "Don't trouble. I'll come to you!"

Sallie stood still. Dawn was breaking, but here under the pergola it was dark and cool and silent. The roses seemed crowding around her, and she pressed a branch of them all fresh and dewy to her face.

As the sound of steps drew nearer through the grove, she pressed a hand to her side to still the wild beating of her heart. It was absurd. She was very much annoyed with herself. A man whom she had known so short a time. Six years ago — and to-night —

Suddenly there was a shot, a stifled exclamation, and she found herself running wildly towards the sounds, filled with terror, before she realized Jimmie's voice, roaring: "Confound you, sir! It's lucky for me you're such a damned bad shot. No, I'm not hurt, no thanks to you. Your nerves need steadying. There's coffee. You'd better come and get some."

Filled with just wrath at the Reverend Pott, he strode through the gate into the garden, to find Sallie clinging to a pillar of the pergola, her head on her arms, her shoulders heaving.

"Oh, I say, Miss Radford," he began, "I am afraid it gave you an awful fright. I am sorry. It was Pott." A sob answered him. He took one step to her side. "Sallie," he cried, his voice caught by a great emotion, "Sallie!" He paused, his hand on her shoulder, then rushed on in a low, shaken voice. "It can't be true, it can't. That I love you—yes—but you! Yet something tells me that it is. I knew as soon as I saw you first that you were the one only woman in the whole world for me—and yesterday, when I saw you standing on the quay, I prayed that it was fate." He paused. "Sallie, I am waiting. After what I have said, you must answer truly."

Sallie raised her head and stood straight for a moment, then turned, still white and shaken. "Oh, you know—you know," she said. Her hands went out blindly, but her eyes were brave, though the colour flooded her face.

Jimmie Saunders gathered the hands into his, and for a moment they stood in the dim light, looking into each other's faces. Then he slowly drew her to him and kissed her.

"What will everybody think?" she said, clinging to him, half crying and half laughing. "It will seem so quick."

"We need not care twopence what anybody thinks. Shall I tell you now what I was thinking on the terrace before dinner? 'If one could have that little head of hers, painted upon a background of pale gold'—And you'll sing to me, Sallie. Think of it! In the big, dim studio at night."

"Oh-h!" said Sallie, breathless.

"And you will be sitting at the piano, and I will come over and turn your head — like this—and kiss you again — like this."

"Oh! I beg your pardon." It was the vicar.
"I am sorry. I—I—saw no one—oh, Miss Radford, I beg your pardon. I am just going to the house for coffee. Don't let me disturb you, Mr. Saunders." The Reverend Pott scurried up

the path; "Scandalous!" he stuttered. "Scandalous!" He was shocked to the marrow. He felt this was no place for him. These painter fellows never had any morals, and the young woman had spoken in a very odd manner at the dinner-table. Still, such indecorous behaviour was hardly what he should have expected under the roof of a nephew of the squire's. He wondered whether it was his duty as a clergyman to give the squire a hint. He had not seen very much, but he had distinctly heard—

"Here's Mr. Pott," Mrs. Wade announced from the drawing-room. "Qui vive, Vicar? What was the shooting? We women all are too exhausted to even ask. The Prince has gone to call the squire and Dacre. Coffee is coming in a minute. At least, we hope so. And have you seen Mr. Saunders? Sallie went to call him ages ago. Are they coming?"

The vicar cleared his throat. "I—believe—er—that I saw them—er—that I heard them—They were not coming just then."

"Oh, Mr. Pott, what was the shooting?" Victoria asked, looking very harassed, as she came in with a jar of biscuits. Before he could

answer, she had sunk into a chair. "Oh!" she shivered, "I wish every one would come."

"Did I not hear a shot, Victoria, my dear?" Aunt Clara demanded, entering the room with a shawl round her head and a hot-water bottle in her arms. "Oh, Vicar! What was the shot? I am extremely nervous: I think, I may say, not without reason. Even Miss McAll, I believe, would consider me justified in my sensations. All this night I have tried without success to reverse—as Horace Biles, in his pamphlet on the maintenance of the health plane, counsels us to do—"

"Reverse!" Victoria murmured. "Have you been dancing, then?"

"Dancing!" Aunt Clara threw a pitying glance upon her. "It is Peace, I mean."

"We do need a little of that," Victoria agreed dejectedly.

"To attain that end, Victoria, you must reverse Tumult and Chaos, you must begin with the letter P— Ten minutes a day with the letter P, Victoria. You must pause and picture the perfect plausibility of paramount perfection."

"Oh, but I know a better game than that,

Aunt Clara," Victoria said, brightening. "You know the one —"

"This is not a game, my dear, but a science," Aunt Clara resumed majestically, "for the propagation of a purer perception. You may read all about it on page 67 of my paper, 'Here's to Health.' I'll get it for you in the morning."

"Oh, thank you," Victoria said hastily. "But do you think you could try the reverse now on Zita? Unless you do, I am afraid that we won't get any coffee."

"I can try," Aunt Clara said, with a little air of plumed importance. "All I ask for is quiet. Vicar, hush, if you please. Let us concentrate our minds upon Zita. Next, we reverse. That is, as Zita is now in an obstinate mood, perverse, and refuses to bring in the coffee, we must picture her as amenable, biddable, peaceful, in fact, bringing the coffee. I do not ask you to judge this theory until you have seen its fruits. Now, please, — when I count three, let us all reverse — One, two, three."

Crash! followed by lamentations in the passage! Victoria sprang to the door and opened it.

Zita sat amid the ruins of the coffee-service.

Aunt Clara rose slowly, an expression of outraged dignity on her face.

"Victoria, you deceived me. It was not a case for the reverse. This proves how disastrous science can be when misapplied."

"What's the matter?" asked Dacre, stepping in through the window. "Is n't coffee ready? Somebody said coffee! Whew!" he whistled at the tableau. Victoria closed the door. "A case for cocktails again, I see! The only coffee-pot broken!"

"Cocktails!" Aunt Clara repeated severely. "Pray, what are cocktails?"

"Ask Victoria," Dacre said wearily. "Well, Uncle James, are you very tired? Hullo, here come Jimmie and Miss Radford. The clan's assembling. Well, Vicar, I hear you nearly potted Jim—no pun intended."

"Coffee?" Jimmie said, beaming, as he followed Sallie in. "No coffee? Well, what does it matter? Nobody wants coffee—nobody wants anything. We've got all we want," he beamed upon Aunt Clara, who sniffed audibly.

At that moment, Victoria opened the door, bearing a kettle and spirit lamp and followed by Maria with tea-things.

"Hip, hip, hurrah! tea!" Jimmie cried.

"You seem very cheerful," Dacre said sourly.

"Yes, yes, my boy, always merry and gay. Let me help, Mrs. Dacre, and do *please* sit down yourself. Now we are all comfy. But where's the Prince? And Mrs. Wade?"

"Shall I just call them?" Mr. Pott volunteered nervously. He rose from his chair and stepped out of the long window. There he stood transfixed. Mrs. Wade and the Prince fancied they had the terrace to themselves. The vicar gasped, took a step, and tripped backward on the sill.

"Everybody's doing it," he groaned, as his head struck the corner of the tea-table.

"Doing what?" asked Aunt Clara.

"Falling, of course," Dacre said, hastening to pick him up. "Have some tea, Vicar?"

"No, sir, I will take neither bite nor sup beneath this roof."

"What!" Dacre gasped.

"No, sir; this is the second time to-night that my feelings have been outraged."

"What do you mean?" Uncle James demanded.

"Mean, sir, mean, sir! — In the presence of

your wife, sir, of that estimable Christian lady, I cannot bring myself to say — But I feel that for a man of my cloth — this is no place — no place!"

"What does he mean?" Victoria cried.

"What can he mean?" Jimmie echoed.

"Not a word from you, sir," cried Mr. Pott.
"You, an artist. It is lamentably true that men of your profession hold the laxest of moral views!"

"You seem to be enjoying yourself," Jimmie drawled. "Though I can't see why you always choose me as a target."

"Enjoying myself! I am deeply pained and grieved, sir."

"But explain yourself," Dacre insisted. "What has Jimmie done?"

"Done, sir! I cannot explain before these ladies, sir. All that is left for me is to go to my room and pack my bag."

CHAPTER XX

"Impossibile!" Zita's position was firm; a hand swathed in a bandage held an important place in her foreground. "Impossibile! signor. Behold, the hand of me is useless—cut—even lacerated by the broken jug. It is too much. The signor said five people only, but it is seven—and no sleep, signor, all the night. Sleep I must have, signor. It is unheard of, signor."

"I quite agree, Zita. It is unheard of," Dacre agreed, in a dejected voice. "But, if you and Maria leave, what shall we do?"

Zita shrugged. "And for my hand? Signor, what do you give me for my lacerated hand?"

"Oh," Dacre groaned, "another case of giving, is it? See here, now. I will give you anything you want, but on the condition that you put the breakfast on the table at once. A good one, too, — grilled kidneys — eggs — fruit — porridge, — and don't forget the pâté. You understand?" Desperation gave Dacre a certain reckless decision. "Now, how much?"

Zita hesitated, in her anxiety to name the highest possible figure. "One hundred francs," she said finally, eyeing her victim.

Dacre drew it from his pocket. "There you are. And after you have put the breakfast on the table, you may go."

"Go!" echoed Victoria from behind. "Dacre, what are you saying? Really, you are too much." She was almost hysterical from the fatigue and excitement of the night. "Of course, she can't go. I will sell every wedding-present I've got, rather than be left here alone with this houseful."

Dacre turned on her sternly. "Leave this to me. This houseful is going to-day. If circumstances do not befriend us, I shall assist them. And if ever I have a spare room again, I can assure you that I won't mention it. Come to the dining-room, my poor child. We shall only have to play up a little longer."

Victoria was wiping her eyes. "Oh, Dacre, do you really think so? I could n't stand it for another day. Good-morning, Sallie. You look as well as if you had slept eight hours!"

Sallie beamed. "I do," she said. "It is such a

gorgeous day. You know, Mr. Saunders and I saw the sun rise from the hill. It seemed so silly to go to bed at dawn. It was simply perfect."

"Really!" Victoria yawned behind her hand.

"Yes, it was glorious." Sallie's face was fervent.

"Come, Miss Radford," Dacre said, "we can't bear scenery at this hour. Hullo, Jimmie. You look as fit as a fiddle!"

"I'am. Did Miss Radford tell you?"

"Yes," Dacre said. "She has told us all."

Jimmie looked surprised. "Well," he said, in a huffy voice, "you might say something decent—since you were so anxious two weeks ago to marry me to the cook!"

"What!!" The Cardens sprang to their feet.
"Not really!"

"Oh, Jimmie," Sallie cried, blushing hotly.

"But, I thought," he said, "Dacre said you had told—"

They got no further, for Sallie was stifled by Victoria's hug, and Jimmie had to save his hand from Dacre's grip.

"But not a word to any one," Sallie whispered, as Aunt Clara approached, followed by Uncle

James, the Reverend Pott, and Maria with the breakfast.

"Good-morning, all. I hope that every one is rested." Aunt Clara's words were pleasant, but her expression had a certain repressed irritability, as she sat down and planted two tins upon the table. "Your mother is not here, my dear Victoria. She is not ill, I hope?"

"Thank you, no, Aunt Clara. Mamma always breakfasts in bed—in her room, I mean."

"Indeed! And the Prince?"

"Oh, his valet came to shave him an hour ago. The Prince always has his premier déjeuner in his room, too, I believe, and his man has taken it to him." Victoria poured the coffee apologetically. "Two lumps, Aunt Clara?"

"No sugar, my dear. No coffee, Victoria. It is many years since I have touched a cup. I find that a pinch of my Pro-Kaffee in hot water is much more nourishing. Yes, I will take an egg. There are few more useful articles of food than the fresh egg of the domestic hen. Its food value is excessive. No bread, Mr. Saunders; I always carry a sealed packet of Nootritive Krums. You mix with your soup or marmalade, and eat them

with a teaspoon. A bit dry, Mr. Saunders? Oh, not at all. If you find them so, all you have to do is to soften them with a few drops of Slimo-Gelatine, which contains all the property of the white of egg. Tasteless, Dacre? Quite. But why pamper your palate?"

"Oh, I don't know," Dacre said irritably.
"Human nature, I suppose."

"James, you're not eating grilled kidney? Not after all that I read you only yesterday in the train? I beg you, James. You do not wish, on this glorious morning, to fill your system with filthy—"

"Clara! That's enough. My system can take care of itself, and, as this is my holiday, I shall eat what I like. Excuse me, Vicar, pass the pâté. Dacre, where did get this pâté? It is a very good one. Before your aunt had these digestive qualms, I used to get them over from Strassburg once a year, you remember?"

"And see the result to-day, James, in your gout?"

"Pooh! Had it since I was a boy. Before I ever saw a pâté."

Aunt Clara sighed profoundly as she turned

to the vicar. "None are so blind as those who won't see, Vicar," she said.

"Quite so, quite so, dear lady," said the vicar, hurriedly disposing of his last mouthful of kidney.

Mrs. Gosseley went on: "After such a shock to the system as you received last night, Vicar—"

"Which?" Jimmie murmured.

"-You should take great care of your diet. Rest the digestive organs. What I should prescribe for you to-day would be a Hydro-Savoury Sandwich with a cup of Hydro-Soup. I can make both for you, as I carry the Hydro in powders with me. Or, if you don't like that, - don't feel up to the exertion of eating, - you might take one of my Brace-o tablets. They are truly wonderful, a delicious, sustaining meal for twopence! Melts in the mouth. I can give you a box. Still, dear Vicar, as I have often said at the Mothers' Meeting at Wimford, in order properly to understand and apply this system of feeding, you should read this little paper! - 'Here's to Health.' It puts you into the very vanguard of modern thought. It touches on everything, and shows how closely our digestions are allied to

our subjective, to our brains, to Buddhism and Christian Science, and how deep breathing and physical culture and ambidexterity, combined with reversing and phrenology, may lead to higher things! I need hardly say it 's absorbing!"

"So absorbing that I don't see how there is much time for anything else," Jimmie declared. "Any one of those little topics would floor me. All I find time for is to live and —"

"Let live," Sallie finished hurriedly.

"Not at all," Jimmie said unkindly; "love, I was going to say. Don't you agree with me, Vicar?"

Mr. Pott rose from the table. "Excuse me, Mrs. Carden, but I have to lock and label my portmanteau."

"Certainly, Vicar. Since you must go, we have ordered the carriage to take you to the midday boat."

"Oh, there's the post!" Dacre exclaimed.
"The 'Daily Mail' for you, Aunt Clara—the
'Times' for you, Uncle James—and letters all
around."

CHAPTER XXI

"Good-Morning." Mrs. Wade appeared at the door of the dining-room, only a little less charming in her white blouse and skirt by day than in the kindly evening light. "Is n't this sad?" she cried, waving a telegram; "I have to leave you all to-day. It came with the letters."

"Oh, mamma!"

"Wire from Center Hodgson that the yacht will call for us at noon — for the Prince and me. It has been such fun, Victoria! I would n't have missed it for anything — just too charming. Has n't it, Mrs. Gosseley? I shall never forget this time. Shall you, Prince?"

The Prince bowed to the others, and turned to her.

"It has been perfect," he declared.

"Has n't it?" Sallie echoed radiantly.

"Ripping!" Jimmie said. "Simply ripping!"

"Glad that you've all enjoyed it," Victoria said, smiling. "Oh, here's the vicar. You are

really off, Mr. Pott? I am sorry that you feel you must leave us."

Mr.Pott bowed stiffly.

"My dear lady, my dear Mr. Carden—" he began; but what he was about to add will never be known, for at that moment Aunt Clara rose from the table, her face flushed, the paper brandished in her hand. "James!" she cried, "we must go—now—instantly—by this boat. James—say not a word—my mind is made up—I am a woman—a free agent—I will act—my path is the path to Rome! Victoria, my dear, you, as a woman, will understand. I do not like to tear myself away from you, but I must go. James, will you arrange for a conveyance?—I go to pack."

Seizing her tins from the table, with a gesture full of dramatic resolve, Aunt Clara turned her back on the astonished group and hurried from the room.

For one moment they stood staring after her, then Uncle James slowly picked up the paper which she had let fall. He scanned its columns carefully, and then, with a groan, sank into the armchair.

"What is it?" Dacre cried. He was already

reading the paragraph designated by Uncle James's shaking forefinger.

"Naples, May 19 — Suffragettes March to Rome. The delegation of English Suffragettes, headed by Miss McAll, reached Naples yesterday. These seventeen ladies have announced their determination to walk from Naples to Rome, and a start is expected to be made this afternoon. Miss McAll, who is in the vanguard of the Suffragette Movement, hopes to raise the women of Italy. Though she cannot speak Italian herself, she has an interpreter in the party, who will explain to Italian women what rights they lack and what they should demand. When once they know, it is believed that they will act. Miss McAll is herself just out of prison, where she successfully carried out a hunger strike."

Uncle James, who was wiping the beads of moisture from his forehead, turned to Dacre piteously. "My boy, this is terrible. Nothing will stop your aunt. I must accompany her. My only hope is that I may avoid a crisis. Possibly another of my heart attacks would deter your aunt, for she is the kindest of women, Dacre. Ah—she is calling."

"James" — Aunt Clara's voice was excited. "I shall have finished packing in ten minutes. But I have mislaid my heavy walking-boots. Can you tell me if they are in the hold-all or in the big portmanteau?"

Uncle James stepped to the door and spoke reluctantly. "When I last saw them, they were in the pilgrim basket."

"Oh!" - Aunt Clara's voice rose again. "I am placing the hot-water bottles and the proteid foods in the smaller hold-all. After you have arranged about the carriage, perhaps you will come in and strap them for me. We must not lose that boat."

The vicar cleared his throat. "Squire," he said, "you have my sincere sympathy. Yet, as it seems a case where it is wiser to bow to the will of Providence than to uselessly oppose it, may I not offer you seats in my carriage, which will be here shortly?"

The squire bowed. "Very kind, Vicar. Thank you."

"I am terribly sorry, dear Uncle James," Victoria said. "But there does not seem anything to do."

"I admit," said Uncle James, "that it comes as a blow to me after our short but—er—pleasant visit here. But I still hope, by accompanying your aunt, to avert a catastrophe."

"I must go and see if I can help her," Victoria said.

Before she could leave the room, however, Mrs. Burrough-Gosseley entered, dressed in a purple costume, a stout pair of walking-boots in evidence, and a pair of dogskin gloves on her hands. The pink and purple toque was firmly tied on her head at an angle by a green scarf.

"Ah, Victoria, my dear, I have thrown things together somehow. It is very trying that I must leave you like this, my dear. But I feel duty calls me to the side of Miss McAll—" she paused. "I don't know that I explained why I've got to leave."

"We know," Dacre said grimly.

"We saw it in the paper," Victoria said gravely. Aunt Clara looked around the circle of lugubrious faces, until she caught a glance of something like approval in the eyes of the painter. She brightened. "I am glad, sir, to see that you, at least, are sympathetic."

Jimmie shook his head. "I don't know, Mrs. Gosseley. Rome does n't offer the temptation to smash that London does. But, I must say, I admire your pluck, if I may be allowed to say so!" He turned to the others. "After all," he said, "it takes courage to be in the unpopular minority!"

Mr. Pott was quivering. "Sir," he said in an outraged voice, "again you show your lax perception of order and disorder, of right and wrong. Mrs. Carden, the carriage must, I think, be at the door. I will say good-bye." He shook hands with her, bowing. "Good-bye, Dacre. We shall see you in your right place, in a proper sphere of utility at Wimford before long, I trust." Then, with a bow embracing the rest of the party, "Good-day," he said. "I wish you all a very good-day." He made for the door, and ran violently into the arms of Maria, who came to announce the carriage. He recovered from the encounter, and without a word rushed on, leaving Maria standing with a scandalised face.

"That's all right, Maria," Jimmie said, in fluent Italian. "It's an English padre, you know. I agree with you, my girl. He is not simpatico!"

"Clara, you must come." Uncle James ap-

peared at the door. "The vicar is afraid of losing the boat. Where's your aunt, Victoria?"

"Here I am!" Mrs. Burrough-Gosseley declared, rushing in. "I had quite forgotten those air-cushions, James. Take them and put them anywhere. Victoria, my dear, before I go, I want to beg you to read this little book of Miss Mc-All's. I brought it for you. It is written by a noble woman—"

"Clara — Clara — my dear. Do come!"

"I am coming, James. Read it, Victoria, and you, dear Mrs. Wade, read it. Coming, James. Good-bye all of you—oh, Victoria, I had nearly forgotten to give you this tin in which I have left you some samples of the foods of which I have spoken. Do, my dear, give them a trial. James, you need n't call so: we shall be in plenty of time."

"You have n't too much, Aunt Clara," Dacre remonstrated.

"No — perhaps not. Good gracious! my bag, Victoria, my little handbag. I must have left it on the bed."

"I will get it," Victoria cried, running out, but was recalled by Mrs. Gosseley's voice.

"All right, dear, I have it. Yes, James, I did pin it. You are quite right. Tell the vicar I am coming. Good-bye, Victoria. Good-bye, Mrs. Wade — Yes, James! Good-bye, Prince — Dacre dear, go and say that I am coming. Good-bye, Miss Radford. I am glad you are for the cause, — and good-bye, Mr. Saunders. I hope some day that we may have the pleasure of seeing you all at Gosseley Hall, where we have plenty of spare room — Yes, coming, coming — Good-bye."

"Well, she is a dear," said Mrs. Wade, "but does she ever get anywhere in time? I bet a dollar, she'll make the Suffragette procession miss the connection all along the line. That reminds me, Prince, we shall keep the yacht waiting if we don't get off. Yes, Victoria, the Prince's man has taken my bag with his. Well, dear, I have enjoyed my visit. It has been such fun seeing you in your own house, under your own roof—"

"Under," Dacre said, quizzically, returning.

"And lovely to see you, Sallie, you dear thing. Happy to have met you, Mr. Saunders, and I shall look for your portraits at the next Academy."

"Thanks," Jimmie answered drily, with an eye on Dacre.

"The Prince has enjoyed it, too," Mrs. Wade ran on, with a glance at him. "Have n't you, Boris?"

The Prince bowed over her hand, and turned to Dacre.

"My airman will take my aeroplane to meet us at Genoa to-morrow. Mrs. Wade — alas has made me promise to fly no more."

"Mamma!" Victoria cried. "You said you loved it!"

"I did," Mrs. Wade said lightly. "Lots of things are fun as an experience. But — oh! we haven't time to talk, you children. Bye-bye. Bless you all. We must simply tear."

"Now, let's have breakfast!" Dacre said briskly, as he and Victoria, Jimmie, and Sallie turned back into the pergola after waving a last farewell to Mrs. Wade and the Prince from the green doorway.

"Why, we have finished breakfast," Sallie declared.

"Poor Dacre," Victoria broke in, "has not eaten anything."

"Thunderclaps from the blue at intervals of every mouthful are not conducive to the enjoyment of a solid meal."

"But they seem to have cleared the air," Jimmie said, pausing to light a pipe.

"And the house," Dacre added. "I am not an inhospitable man as a rule, Miss Radford, but—"

"Don't worry," Jimmie interjected with a grin. "I have told her all about you, so now we're quits! See here, old man," he continued, "if you are really going back to consume more pâté -"

"A cup of coffee —" Dacre snapped.

"Pâté was a figure of speech - why, I am going for a walk to get an idea of the island. You don't want to come?"

"Later," Dacre answered. "I feel like a boiled owl. Take the two girls. I'll be all right after food."

Victoria demurred. "I really must not go. You see, Sallie, I have got to talk to the servants. Zita is an old fraud and I'm bound to have my money's worth out of her. But you two go! The walks are lovely whichever way you turn. We shan't expect you till we see you."

"I ought to write some letters," Sallie murmured.

"A becoming remark, but quite untrue," Jimmie laughed. Then, turning to Victoria, "Expect us when you see us, as you said, Mrs. Carden."

"Oh, we shall surely be back to luncheon," Sallie declared.

"Or tea," Jimmie amended, smiling upon her.
"You're following the fortunes of a tramp, remember!"

Sallie returned his smile with confidence as they turned away together. Then, remembering the existence of their host and hostess, they looked back, but already Dacre and Victoria had forgotten them.

CHAPTER XXII

PEACE reigned over the terrace at the Villa Felice. Maria, bearing coffee to the signor and signora, smiled at the sight of her children happily seated side by side in garden-chairs.

"What a contrast to last night," Dacre exclaimed, with a sigh.

"Yes, is n't it? But, Dacre dear, what can have happened to those two?"

Dacre lit a cigarette. "Don't worry," he said; "Jimmie can take care of her and they are engaged."

"But it is hours since they left and they said they'd be back for tea. Is he a very good person?"

"Yes, but your friend Sallie has her head screwed on the right way. She can keep him straight. For heaven's sake, don't bother. We've been bothering about other people for the last twenty-four hours—now let's make the most of this interval of peace. They will be turning up soon with a long story."

"And we shall have to be polite and listen and pretend to believe it," Victoria added pensively. "It is lovely being by ourselves. Still it is odd. It is not a bit like Sallie."

"You never can tell," Dacre began sententiously, but stopped as Maria appeared. "Now, what—"

"Please," said Maria, "here's a telegram, and he's waiting for an answer."

"Good Lord!" cried Dacre, tearing open the envelope; "I hope that no one else is coming." He began to read, and then gave a low whistle.

"What is it?" asked Victoria. "Read it aloud."

"Hold on to your chair," said Dacre. "Here goes:—'Give us your blessing. Married by Pott at Naples. Explain all by letter. Off to Ravello. See you in Capri next week. Forgive us. Sallie and Jimmie Saunders.'

"Well, I'm damned!" said Dacre.

"Dacre," said Victoria reprovingly. "But is n't it dreadful! Imagine Sallie doing such a thing!"

"Well, I call them jolly lucky and sensible. Neither of them has any relations to fuss around. And we have at last got the villa to ourselves."

"Iknow," Victoria answered. "It seems years since we have been alone."

"Signor, the man is waiting."

"Oh, tell him," said Dacre, "there is no answer. Oh, wait. We will wire them, Vic. Give me a piece of paper." Dacre drew a pencil from his pocket and wrote:—

"Congratulations, you splendid, silly people. More than pleased to see you next week. There's our spare room!"

THE END

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